TWENTIETH THOUSAND.

YE VAMPYRES!

A LEGEND

"He came by stealth, and unlocked my door,
And I have drunk the blood since then
Of thrice three hundred thousand men."—Coleridge.

1875 20th thousand

Maenier Dickson.

[Albert Grant?]

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YE VAMPYRES!

A Legend

OF

THE NATIONAL BETTING-RING,

SHOWING WHAT BECAME OF IT.

BY

THE SPECTRE.

DEDICATED BY EXPRESS PERMISSION, AND WITH UNALTERABLE GRATITUDE AND VENERATION, TO

JOHN BULL, ESQ.

"'Tis time to give 'em physic, their diseases
Are grown so catching.'—SHAKESPEARE.

LONDON:
SAMUEL TINSLEY, 10 SOUTHAMPTON ST., STRAND.
1875.
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PREFACE TO THE TENTH THOUSAND.

A PREFACE would ye, Mr. Bull?
I thought my book was p'r'aps too full
Already!—Well then, an ye will,
And these poor lines the want fulfil,
I'll follow custom for the nonce.
* * * * * *

With pen in hand, in quick response
To your desire,—I've one request.
—That when I say I've done my best,
—I can no more!—you'll understand
Obediently to your command
This trial's made.

What—though I fail!
* * * * * *

With harbour left!
With crowding sail!
—I'll quick 'close reef'—nor e'er 'turn-tail,'
But bolder ride th' oncoming gale—
Clear decks for ACTION!—Battle—hail
Great is the RIGHT!
IT shall prevail!

THE SPECTRE.

PREFACE.

'THIS is true liberty, when freeborn men,
Having to advise the public, may speak free;
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise.
Who neither can, nor will, may hold his peace:
What can be juster in a state than this?'

EURIPIDES (MILTON'S *Translation*).

'As good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were, in the eye.

'Many a man lives a burden to the earth, but a good book is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life.

'It is true no age can restore a life, whereof, perhaps, there is no great loss, and revolutions of ages do not oft recover the loss of a rejected truth, for the want of which whole nations fare the worse. We should be wary therefore what persecution we raise against the living labours of public men, how we spill that seasoned life of man, preserved and stored up in books, since we see a kind of homicide may thus be committed, sometimes a martyr-

dom; and, if it extend to the whole impression, a kind of massacre; whereof the execution ends not in the slaying of an elemental life, but strikes at the ethereal and fifth essence, the breath of reason itself; slays an immortality rather than a life.' (MILTON'S *Areopagitica*, vol. ii. p. 55, Bohn's Standard Library.)

If History repeats itself, an ancient extract of an unknown date may not inappropriately be here introduced. It is as follows:

'It is to be lamented that a market of such importance as the present state of the nation has made theirs (viz. that for Stocks and Shares) should be brought into any discredit by the introduction of bad men, who, instead of serving their *Countree*, and procuring an honest subsistence in the army or the fleet, endeavour to maintain luxurious tables and splendid equipages by sporting with the public credit.

'It is not long since the evil of Stock-jobbing was risen to such an enormous height as to threaten great injury to every actual proprietor; more particularly to many widows and orphans, who, being bound to depend upon the Funds for their whole subsistence, could not possibly retreat from the approaching danger.

'But this evil . . . was, like many other, at length subdued by its own violence; and the reputable *Vortex*-brokers seem now to have it in their power effectually to prevent its return by not suffering the most distant approaches of it to take footing in their own practice, and by opposing every effort made for its recovery by the desperate sons of fortune, who, not having the courage of highwaymen, TAKE 'Change-alley rather than the road, because, though more injurious than highwaymen, they

are less in danger of punishment by the loss either of liberty or life.

'With respect to . . . the proprietors of the Public Funds, who are busy in the improvement of their fortunes, it is sufficient to say—that no motive can sanctify the accumulation of wealth but an ardent desire to make the most honourable and virtuous use of it, by contributing to the support of good government, the increase of arts and industry, the rewards of genius and virtue, and the relief of wretchedness and want.

'"What GOOD, what TRUE, what FIT we justly call,
Let this be all our care, for this is all:
To lay this TREASURE up, and hoard with haste
What *every day* will want, and most the *last*.
This done, the poorest can no wants endure;
And this not done, the richest must be poor." POPE.'

YE VAMPYRES!

A Legend.

INTRODUCTION.

'And many strokes, though with a little axe,
Hew down and fell the hardest-timbered oak.'
SHAKESPEARE.

THE year's A.D. one million. I once abode on earth; but now I'm never seen except at nights, nor even then unless I choose.

A poor and wretched Spectre, with limbs so lank and so attenuated, eyes sunken, features wasted, and toothless lantern jaws, I scarcely show a trace of my once luxuriantly splendid growth of hair. Ah, shades of Rowland, in vain would ye restore!

I'm ever on the wing; now here, now there, and then I'm gone afar. Sometimes I visit Courts and Palaces. Again I lodge beneath the humble cotter's roof. 'Tis one to me, so I perform the mandates of Creation. Few make of me a friend; none care to have me for their enemy. Ne'er do I pine from noontide heats, nor pestilence, nor frigid zone's recoil.

Time long with me had lapsed—Eternity begun—when many, many thousand years ago I wandered amongst the Spheres. I had come from far-distant Space, myriads of spaces off—you cannot tell the number—and once again was on the earth.

A cry of anguish which haunts me even yet had brought me down; one wild, piercing shriek from pretty lips—ah, so pretty!

All had been seen long, long before. I proceeded to take Spectral notes of what I witnessed during my stay in the Countrees far and near, for I desired to treasure everything. I also wished at starting to meet with some persons, interested in the object of my sojourn, who would assist me in my work. It is due indeed to the memory of such kind friends to say that regions of Space, far, far remote from earth, have fully occupied my time since then, or else this little book would not have tarried so.

Part the First.

Chapter I.

'Strike while the iron is hot.'

Of all the old Countree's beauteous counties, none was, in the days I'm speaking of, so justly celebrated for richness of foliage and undying delicacy of tint as Heartshire. It was quite as noted too for the warmth and ever-renewing lights and shades, which, despite all weathers and changes of whatever kind, hovered and danced over its variegated scenery. The morning was changeable, the month your April; showery at times, then bright and clear—but what was weather to a Spectre?—and I stood waiting, for I had knocked at Welcome Grange—a noble mansion, new to me—as was Heartgate, a pretty little town close by; yet misgivings had I none.

Could all the servant maids who opened the door to you in Heartshire be buxom? Selina was. She started; for I was so lank. I grieved, but would not budge an inch. Instead, I breathed into her pretty ear, 'Are the Women of th' Old Countree at home?' The buxom maid now smiled; for I had smiled; it did me good—and her no harm, I think. 'The Ladies are,' the buxom maid replied.

'I'd rather see the women,' I told Selina, and handed her my Spectral card.

'Oh, Sarah! Sarah! Kate! do come; here's a—a—a—a Spectre! Oh! oh!'

And Selina had left me dangling in the wind with the hall door open. She looked hysterical; how I grieved again!

'Oh, never mind,' I now implored, 'I'll see the ladies.' Up came the cook and kitchen-maid.

'You foolish thing, Selina!' cried stout Sarah; 'the Spectre's quite "respectable;" how could you now! She's new you know to Heartshire,' she said, turning to me; 'ain't she, Kate?'

They all then blushed, and talked so fast together that I could not understand a word. The buxom maid had quite come-to, and led me to the drawing-room.

I never could stand tears, and when Selina told me she was

sorry, and cried, I told her she'd amused me. And there we were, and I now found out that she was very beautiful.

Selina loitered, putting things wrong, and then arranging them, and I encouraged her; while tender reminiscences of bygone years rushed fast upon me. I longed to be once more upon the earth in living flesh. I sighed—it could not be! yet meagre as it was, my whole frame vibrated.

'I'm new to Heartshire,' said Selina. And I remarked condolingly, 'Ah, so am I.'

'You must visit Countrees far more beautiful at times,' said she. 'Ah, I should like to be a Spectre!'

'No, really!' I said; 'but why?'

'Because I'd take a great fly off somewhere, I know I would,' Selina said, with earnestness. She stopped her work and looked at me with perfect confidence, and I was pleased. It now struck four. 'Light no more fires,' I said; 'I feel no cold.' She then withdrew, wishing, she said, that all were Spectres at Welcome Grange; for rubbing grates so soiled her fingers—and they were pretty ones—for letter-writing, I think she said.

She soon returned to say the women of the Old Countree were home, and would I see them? Selina's sweet voice faltered. Was I in an enchanted house? What made me dwell upon her every word and gesture, to the utter distraction of my Spectral soul? Each moment she grew more beautiful. Even when she bit her pretty little finger-nails—a habit I did not admire—I loved her for it. Was she transforming me? My lank old limbs were almost in a glow; I dared not breathe a word; and then—and then—she'd glided out unconsciously before I could utter the words,

'I'll see them all, if they'll oblige so far.'

Another door in the capacious room now opened. Oh, how my Spectral heart leaped to my Spectral mouth! I bowed my best Spectral bow, while hundreds of glorious creatures curtsied as they entered. And there we stood confronting one another. What a delicious moment!

It now was evident by their *movement* that they appreciated my warm though Spectral admiration of them. Ah, it must end too soon! I at once nerved myself to my task.

Did I say, 'Divine creatures! Haw—permit me—haw'? No; but I did tremblingly venture to breathe into their loving ears, while they looked on enchantingly,

'I am here to ask you to allow me to dedicate a book upon a subject of universal interest to you; most respectfully, I assure—'

'Respectfully?' all voices cried. Some of the loveliest moved quickly towards the door; others raised their wonderfully handsome arms reproachfully; while all of these superb creatures looked aghast! Ah, what had I done? 'Affectionately,' I urged.

The loveliest ones about the door now paused. A few made signs of coming back; the gorgeously handsome arms of others dropped,—all seemed inclined to hear if not yield to my request. Still I saw a kind of hesitation amongst the most bewitching ones, and it was the ears of these who influenced the world and all created things I wanted to catch. Ah, how their divine warmth and radiance glowed like sunbeams in their path about the room! They could not touch a Spectre, but again the memory of other days, intensified a thousand-fold, now rushed across me. Losing all self-command, seizing the moment ere it had passed, I obeyed the instinct of the moment.

Recalling the bright, the vivid past, my Spectral breath coming so quick that I could scarce utter the words which trembled on my Spectral lips, I bowed low at the glorious feet of the most enslaving ones.

'*Endearingly!*' I now breathed into their willing beauteous ears.

Oh, the ecstacy of that moment! to witness those loveliest of countenances radiant with untold affection! to watch the richest of heavenly colours mantling and diffusing themselves amongst those god-like features! and then to see the soft, winning smile of grace, of beauty, and of love echoing and re-echoing amongst them until you never knew when it had died out,—leaving in its train so exquisite a sense of its reality, that though lustrous eyes sparkled less brilliantly, yet ever and anon stray gleams shot forth, kindling afresh the holy flame which encircled them.

'Rise, Spectre, rise!' I heard from voices all around me. Need I say that I was overcome, even to Spectral faintness, as all these wondrously-alluring creatures crowded in upon me; but their warm, loving eyes looked, ah, so nice! that my request was granted without a dissentient voice; and that I felt during those few moments mere supremely happy than ever I had been either in the flesh or in Specteria?

Chapter II.

'Abide with me from morn till eve;
For without Thee I cannot live.
Abide with me when night is nigh;
For without Thee I *would* not die,'

sang a queenly-looking creature in the capacious drawing-room at Welcome Grange. It was now evening. Our first, brief mutual surprise had been long over, and these adorable creatures had settled down into their easy, flowing, graceful manner. The voice of her who had been singing was clear and rich—her heart big and warm, for I could see its pulsations tell as I gazed upon her incomparably lovely bosom. She was not ashamed of anybody knowing how grand, how throbbing it was!

She now advanced towards me, and asked, in a voice so ringing and so kindly, what was the nature of the book I wished to dedicate to the Ladies of the Old Countree?

'To the Women, if you please,' I gently breathed. 'We are all Ladies here,' said she. 'Ah, but *you* are Women indeed,' I said. 'I seek to enlist your sympathies—for Woman rules the world.' 'Woman rules the world!' said she. 'Woman rules man!' cried all. 'We always thought that Man rules Woman—at least, he says he does.'

'Do you believe him?' I asked of all. 'Woman rules him most who most rebels against her sway. All men are in their hands. They're like the potter's clay; you make of them just what you will—to honour one; and another to disgrace.

''Twas ever thus. Hark! that voice of Sacred History comes rolling through the mighty depths of ages! I know not whence it came, nor how; but there, 'tis writ—ye see it every day—"The woman tempted me, and I did eat." 'Twas thus her power for weal or woe was first proclaimed. A written monument of sadness, yet of truth! Else whence the sorrowful idea?

'A warning voice proclaimed, "She tempted me, and I did eat." The world's great Lawgiver has not erred; the thought is fixed upon the human mind. 'Twas thus her influence began. And if began in sorrow and in shame, shall it not end in joy?'

They all were silent. So again I asked them:

'Do you still believe him? Take a case then. Yon crabbed bachelor hates all womankind. He would not have one enter his abode for half his worth. "They sha'n't come meddling here," says he, "not they." He thinks he's free from their control, nor listens to their "whimpering nonsense." He'll growl just as he likes;

nor by word nor gesture shall they bid him nay. Savage by nature, softness never sways his soul. Fool! who, thus eschewing intercourse with woman and dreading fellowship with her, fearful to lose his liberty, becomes the very slave of slaves! Nor dare he say his castle is his own, nor that the chimney smokes, nor quick runs out the kitchen beer, how rapidly the bills mount up, how followers increase, wages multiply, holidays recur, so many breakages, such kitchen gossip! And why? That liberty which women of sense and beauty would dearly prize he has surrendered to—his cook.'

A pretty little wench stepped up and gave me a sweet nosegay of Heartshire flowers. 'For sticking up for us,' she said. 'It's all nonsense, Spectre, though; you can't mean what you say. Why, men rule the Old Countree—men rule everywhere. I think it nice; it saves a lot of trouble.'

'Your pretty little flowers I'll waft to Spectre-land,' I breathed into her sweet tiny ear. 'They never shall die there, but flower on in everlasting bloom. If men rule the Old Countree, yet woman rules the men. Who governs this your land? Who rules the Old Countree? A woman—a Queen. She reigns in every heart—herself, not Her Majesty! That woman's kindly heart whose pulses tell in every poor man's cottage. 'Tis this pervades the Old Countree.

'So used are ye to gentle, queenly sway,
Nor will discover, till 'tis ta'en away,
The fulness of its gladness.
Yet, could the sun stop short, and miss one day,
Perchance such weird catastrophe might convey
The measure of a nation's sadness.'

'Right loyal, noble heart!' cried she of stately mien 'pray give your reasons.' 'Reasons for what?' I asked. 'For what you tell us now concerning this our Queen. Speak freely, for ours are women's hearts.' 'Concerning your Queen. Her gentle heart is touched by others' woes. She hears of sudden misery, sickness, or death, and straight away she goes, nor needs great Counsellor's assistance. But quick she writes with her own gentle hand sweet words of comfort to some lone, weeping widow; or to parents just bereft of offspring dear she flashes messages of kindliest sympathy. That is the woman who governs the Old Countree; who makes of her what she now is, who sways her rude strong hearts. Whence comes that message full and strong, that hope-inspiring word? Straight from her warm, throbbing bosom, from the warm, loving bosom of your Queen. Nor can she richer

gifts from Heaven implore than blessings besought by her devoted sons.'

These glorious creatures were magnificent in their enthusiasm. 'Tell, oh, tell us, Spectre,' each and all replied, 'what it's about, this book of yours? We'll help you, if we can.'

'Be ye my patrons, judges, friends,' I asked them quietly. 'Hear all I've got to say, and then you shall review.'

And 'twas agreed. I was about to bid adieu. Could Spectres weep, I should have sobbed at leaving those lovely creatures.

Chapter III.

'He had a face like a benediction.'—Cervantes.

'That's Mr. Bull!' all cried. 'We know his knock of old; just like the Spectre's too: one, two, three, four.'

'It seems to say "Let me come in," I breathed. 'I'm but just come from seeing Mrs. Bull, so with your leave I'll wait and see her husband.' 'Do, do!' they said. 'The work is new to us; perhaps he'll help.'

The door now opened wide. 'Good-evening, ladies all,' said Mr. Bull. He seemed in a tremendous heat and bustle; but quickly advanced into their midst with such a jolly, beaming countenance, I felt quite glad I'd waited.

He chatted on so gaily, all felt at their ease. He seemed "all there," which I need not add the Spectre always is.

Mr. John Bull now wiped the perspiration off his brow.

'About the Undone Vortex then,' said he to me. 'I've left Snug Villa in hot haste to reach you before you left the Grange. I've caught it so from Mrs. Bull for what she calls "shirking my duty," that here I am entirely at your service. Make any use of me, my name—my reputation! Mine!' thundered he. 'And when I say a thing, I mean it. I am John Bull all over.' 'I'm sure I'm very glad to hear it, Mr. Bull,' I said. 'But now I dedicate my work to these, my good friends here—the Women of the Old Countree, with their gracious, charming permission.'

The air vibrated as they looked their tender acknowledgments to the bow I made to them. 'Deuce take it; deuce take it!' cried he in a voice choking with ill-suppressed wrath. 'You see, Mr. Spectre, times have changed so since you first called on me. Who could then have conjectured that one's own boys would so soon have taken to Vortexing? There's that Harry now, as fine a lad as ever stept; made a little money first, but he's been dropping it

ever since, and got into debt besides. And now the—the—what is its?—Vortexers have ATTACHED his property ! Damn 'em, I say.'

Here a veritable little shudder ran through the group of beauty assembled, which Mr. Bull immediately perceived, for it was audible: bosoms swelled more perceptibly, bright eyes looked askance from one to the other, and then at the jolly form of this worthy and notable representative of the Old Countree's greatness.

Pausing for a second or two, and turning to the glorious creatures who surrounded him, he continued, boiling with wrath and indignation:

'And 'tisn't as though Harry's the only one; there's Ned, and then there's Tom, both at it, and both a-losing money like fun-o; and I shall have to pay the piper ! And who gets it, I should like to know? Why—them—damn—Vortexers !' he roared, a fit of tremendous perspiring fury preventing further utterance.

Again gentle bosoms heaved a deprecating little sigh. One fair and lovely creature extended the prettiest of little forefingers, while she laughed out the words, 'Gently, John, gently,' and then seemed so tickled at what she had said that she ended by a little laugh outright, and this became very infectious. Selina now appeared with wine and fruit, which Mr. Bull helped to hand round. When he came to me, he said:

'Don't take any I s'pose, do you, Mr. Spectre? Wish you did, 'twould help you along rather.' And then the redoubtable John himself appealed to me—what had he been saying? was there any harm in it, &c.?

I quietly replied, 'Good, I think. I have a grim, Spectral liking to the use of what some people are in the habit of calling "bad langwidge," and as nothing on earth half comes up to it, it is a pity it should be dropped. The Undone Vortex Saints may not indulge in it, fearful lest it should be too much akin to their practices. If an occasional use of it would clear the atmosphere of *them*, I should like to hear of its extensive though temporary adoption. Extreme indulgence should be avoided, lest it might lose in quality. Its entire loss to the Old Countree would be irreparable, especially as applicable to the Undone Vortex and to its Saints.'

It was now plain Mr. Bull liked me, and I need scarcely add I liked Mr. Bull. I watched my opportunity. I begged the lovely women about me to settle the matter among themselves, seeing clearly how it would all end, and desiring nothing so much—provided I obtained their hearty coöperation—as his patronage.

I began to repeat from memory some lines which struck me as applying to the case, should things turn out as I desired. They are as follows, and are from the pen of a famous old Spectre, who was once styled the great 'North Kintrie Bardie.'

'I own 'twas rash and rather hardy,
That I, a simple kintra bardie,
Should meddle wi' a pack sae sturdy,
Wha, if they ken me,
Can easy, wi' a single wordie,
Lowse hell upon me.

'But I gae mad at their grimaces ;
Their sighin', cantin', grace-proud faces ;
Their three-mile prayers an' hauf-mile graces ;
Their raxan conscience,
Whase greed, revenge, an' pride disgraces
Waur nor their nonsense.

* * * * *

'O Pope ! had I thy satire's darts,
To gie the rascals their deserts,
I'd rip their rotten, hollow hearts,
An' tell aloud
Their jugglin' hocus-pocus arts
To cheat the crowd.

'God knows, I'm no the thing I should be,
Nor am I even the thing I could be ;
But twenty times I rather would be
An atheist clean
Than under Gospel colours hid be,
Just for a screen.

'An honest man may like a glass,
An honest man may like a lass ;
But mean revenge an' malice fause
He'll still disdain,
And then cry zeal for Gospel laws,
Like some we ken.

'They take religion in their mouth ;
They talk o' mercy, grace, an' truth.
For what ? To gie their malice shouth
On some puir wight,
An' hunt him down, o'er right an' ruth,
To ruin straight.

'All hail, Religion ! maid divine !
Pardon a muse sae mean as mine,
Who in her rough, imperfect line
Thus daurs to name thee.
To stigmatise false friends of thine
Can ne'er defame thee.

'Though blocht an' foul wi' mony a stain,
An' far unworthy of thy train,

With trembling voice I tune my strain
To join with those
Who boldly dare thy cause maintain,
In spite of foes,

In spite o' crowds, in spite o' mobs,
In spite o' undermining jobs,
In spite o' dark banditti stabs
At worth an' merit
By scoundrels, even wi' holy robes,
But hellish spirit.

* * * *

'Pardon this freedom I have ta'en ;
An' if impertinent I've been,
Impute it not, good sir, in ane
Whase heart ne'er wranged ye,
But to his utmost would befriend
Ought that belanged ye.

'O Mr. Spectre, Mr. Spectre, put it to me. I shall be proud of the honour. Make a good case out, and I'll stand by you, that I will,' cried Mr. Bull warmly. In his excitement he thumped his heavy fist upon the table, and I knew he meant what he said. 'And we will help you all we can,' said the lovely creatures. 'How fortunate you came in time, Mr. Bull—just the very thing.'

And this is how I'm privileged to dedicate my book to John Bull, an ancestor of whom you, his worthy descendant, may even in the year one million (A.D. of course), be justly proud.

I was about to leave. I turned. Mr. Bull was in tears. Yes, John Bull—the great ! the sturdy ! the hearty !—in tears. There he stood with his dearly-loved boys' CONTRACTS in hand, which he was vainly endeavouring to 'decipher.' And they were for 'speculative accounts,' into which his poor boys had been inveigled. And I said to him at once, 'Mr. Bull, Mr. Bull, don't take it to heart so ! Give them to me, please, and state the circumstances. If they can assist, amongst the mass of evidence I am daily collecting, I shall be sure to bring them forward.'

He thanked me, and I promised to call and get all the particulars of his sons' 'unfortunate accounts.'

Delicious music now struck up, and a voice in sweet, enthralling strains bade all to 'throw dull care away.' And gentle, little forms clustered around John Bull, and begged him not to cry. And this jolly old soul stooped and kissed the dear little maids, and in a moment I was gone—it was too much ! And the hearts of the Women of the Old Countree were to be henceforth in honoured, if in Spectral keeping.

Chapter IV.

'Perhaps it may turn out a sang,
Perhaps turn out a sermon.'—Burns.

Bluffshire was, in the days I'm speaking of, one of the jolliest counties in the Old Countree. Once arrived at its wild, romantic coast, you could be as free and retired as fancy bade you, luxuriating in an almost unbroken solitude, while listening to the shriek of the wild fowl which abounded there in plenty. The lofty downs along the brink of the restless ocean invited to repose and relaxation, while the deep sea's roar filled the soul with rapture. If Bluffshire excelled in hospitality, for which it was proverbial, the noble house of Trememdon flourished as did no other in that part of the Old Countree. And when you fully understand that the Marquis of Tremendon

'—was a fine *Old Countree* gentleman, one of the olden time,'

you scarcely need be told that

'—he spent his money
At a bountiful old rate,'

nor what he did for

'—the old poor at his gate.

The villagers, the tenants, the neighbouring farmers, and the coast-guardsmen all along the borders of his great property, and, in short, every one who lived to bless his memory after he was gone, testified to his virtues and to his worth.

He was in those halycon days, not only the owner of a vast estate, but the proprietor of several mines in the neighbourhood of the castle, and was by far the most influential man in that part of the Old Countree.

The Trememdon family were one of the most ancient in Bluffshire. They were rooted in the soil. Scores and hundreds of them were, and in all probability are now, being daily transformed into Trememdon mutton, if Trememdon sheep grazed in those days, as they may do now, in old Trememdon churchyard.

Proud, however, as old Trememdon was of his stock, his descent, and his pedigree, there were other things he was at that time prouder of than even these.

One was—his Unswerving Honour. Another was—his Unfaltering Rectitude. And a third was—his Boundless Goodwill.

He would not merely say, 'Come, you shall be jolly here, or you shall go away.' He went further, for he said, 'You sha'n't

go away—you shall stay and be jolly.' And everybody stayed and was jolly.

His understanding with his tenantry was perfect, for it was personal. He would say, in cases of dispute, 'Look'ee here, my friend, all my estates belong to my tenants, and all my tenants belong to me; we are not two, but one!'

No wonder that the tenants loved him, for they believed in what he said, and he was as good as his word. It was of no use agitators coming; all that the tenants required was seasonable weather, and if that failed, the Marquis was lenient in collecting his rents, for he said, 'How can my tenants improve the estate if they lack the funds to do it with? The estate is *ours!* No, they cannot help the weather. I will diminish my expenses, and we will share our difficulties together. That old Thorne's a capital fellow,' said the Marquis to General Truelove, one day at dinner, 'but the old chap thought I wanted to make money out of him. Me! ha, ha, ha, ha!' And the old Marquis laughed long and merrily, and then told the General that he would have gone on thinking so, but that he jumped off his cob, and was down by the old fellow's side in a moment—no amount of reasoning would do—and got him by the hand, for Thorne and his family had held their land for many generations, and had always been good tenants. 'And to cut a long story short, Truelove, Thorne and a lot more are to come up to-morrow to an early dinner, and you shall see my tenantry. I told them they wouldn't see the Marchioness, and gave the reason why.'

At that moment tiny cries were audible, even in the great old castle hall. They proclaimed a recent event within those ancient walls:

> 'A mother is a mother still:
> The holiest thing alive.'

The lovely little Marchioness was in her room, and was certain to be there a few days longer. That was the reason why.

Chapter V.

> '—they won't
> Or can't do otherwise than lie, but do it
> So well, the very truth seems falsehood to it.'—Byron.

In the days I am speaking about, the city of Undone was the largest in the world. It was the boast of the Old Countree. In its centre I found a great building called the Undone Vortex.

I watched it long and gazed upon it often, whirling and eddying *within closed portals.*

I saw many inhabitants running to and fro, in and out of this 'House' of the world, engaged in what they called 'doing bargains' for those they termed 'outsiders.' I listened attentively, and I soon discovered some who were called 'brokers' doing 'outsiders' as well as doing 'bargains.' It did not take me very long to find out that.

Nimrod Myrabolanes was a Vortex broker. He was a lover of horseflesh,—not *per se*, but only as it paid him. He did not love horses as did some; he never thought about whether they had souls; all he required in them was staying power, if he ran to win, which he never did unless his 'book' was made that way. Honesty was no possession of Nimrod's; his motto was, 'Lie of course, but—tell the right sort.'

Nimrod always told the right sort—he would have been everlastingly disgraced had he failed in this. Everybody on the Vortex knew the right sort to tell, and also that Nimrod was incapable of telling the wrong sort. Many said, 'It is odd!' for Nimrod had not prospered. Nimrod was fast—oh, very! Now to be chronically 'on the loose' and to be on the Undone Vortex were not to be mentioned together. Vice must be 'respectable.' No 'loose boxes'—*pour les petites dames*, for a Vortex broker, if you please. Place not his soul in jeopardy! Steal, lie, despoil, but—in a respectable way. Now Nimrod's vices were pronounced 'not respectable.' Others said, with all self-complacency—but these were saints,—'Therefore Nimrod hath not prospered!' Nimrod used to argue thus: A wife I should like, and in my sort of way—l-o-v-e. A lot of children I could manage to put up with, if kept in the rear, except perhaps on Sundays, when, provided my horses did not want any looking after, they might make of me their haystack for an hour, and tumble over me. A wife would cost—incalculably much; *une dame de compagnie* costs me—I know how much, and I can get rid of her. I prefer the ills I know. The Undone Vortex is unstable—fickle. Well off to-day, I might be a 'gone coon' to-morrow. Ha! beast as I feel myself to be, a houseful of starving brats would excruciate Nimrod a good long while after to-morrow. Ergo, I won't get any; therefore I'll stay content. Q.E.D. Nimrod had two clerks: Raskall Clencher, a native of Naveshire, and Alick Goodheart, a Heartshireman by birth. Alick was young, bright-eyed, fearless, and frank, and too thoughtless to consider the nature of the so-called 'transactions' in which Nimrod was engaged until years had induced reflection.

Upon one occasion I watched Raskall enter the 'House' after receiving 'instructions' from Nimrod. Now Raskall had not been 'brought up,' according to the phraseology then in vogue, 'in the fear of the Lord.' When he came out, after having spoken to others of the inhabitants who were called 'jobbers,' and who staid mostly inside, he told one, Meteor Cowries, things,—oh, so different to what they had 'instructed' him, that I wondered how he could stand upright and do it; but then—he had been trained!

And I saw an icy grin steal over and settle itself so comfortably upon Raskall's face, while poor, yet naughty, Meteor staked —not his—no! his employer's—money, and lost! And the poor 'outsiders' nearly always did lose, for they could not enter to see for themselves. It resembled playing with opponents who, having loaded dice or cards which had been marked, the chances were ninety-nine times out of a hundred against them.

Sometimes, of course, the 'outsider' was lucky, but that proved his ruin, for then he never got away until he was, in Vortex phraseology, 'cleared out.' The Undone Vortex had 'books' opened for other bets than those on the rise or fall of stocks, shares, and scrip. Sporting bargains were included in the 'business' done, and considered 'respectable' in this 'House' of the world! Saints possibly qualified their approval of these proceedings, but in this they were not allowed to rule.

Chapter VI.

'Be bolde, be bolde, and everywhere be bolde.'—Spenser.

Fernland was, in the days I speak of, a beautifully lovely Antipodean Far Countree, belonging to the Old Countree, and one of the many she had conquered and taken possession of, by means of which she had grown richer than any other countree in the world.

There were a great many natives in it who were so bold, clever, and warlike, that she found it difficult to preserve order in it and defend the lives of the inhabitants who had gone over from the Old Countree to take possession. All was quiet for a time, however, and travellers could, at the date at which this history commences, journey in safety throughout its entire length and breadth.

As I was directed to visit it, I flitted over and was there in a

moment. Upon the banks of a huge swollen river stood two youths, bridle in hand. They had come a long distance through mountainous ranges. They looked sunburnt, hearty, and seasoned. Except that one had slightly higher cheek-bones than the other, and was stouter, they might have been takeu for twin-brothers. They had left their mother some few weeks before in Fernland's northern settlement, Northtown. Ralph Osborne was four years younger than Walter Maxwell, his half-brother. Their mother had married again, choosing her former husband's cousin—or he her, as the case might be—for her second. Although the cousins had been as dissimilar as their dispositions, the boys were as fatally alike as their tempers and tastes were opposed. It was springtime, and the mountains of winter snow were melting under the sun's fierce rays, and flooding the big rivers. The fall of the mighty avalanche resounded amongst the distant peaks and ranges with a noise like thunder. The day was glaring hot and scorching; the force of the blast was at times terrific, bending the trees and shrubs and the tall waving grass. Fernland had in those early days few ferries—and fewer bridges. Crazy canoes, or the flax-raft of the warrior, served their stead. Often the riders, despising danger, plunged into the stream, and took their chance with no more concern than an inhabitant of Undone city at crossing a crowded street, menaced by what they called Hansom drivers. An aged native woman, or Ferna, stood on Gonganui's further bank warning the travellers back. She had no strength to paddle across and bring two great struggling horses behind and land them safely in such a freshet. The lads were impetuous; they had held a brief parley, smoked a pipe, and forthwith dashed into the stream.

'Don't pull so!' I heard the younger shouting. I turned; there was Walter's horse, heels up, floating in the stream, without a rider, while Ralph had steered to his brother's help. 'For God's sake, don't, Walter! you'll have me over next!' cried the younger, as Walter's weight nearly upset him.

'Don't leave a fellow!' gasped the other, the torrent nearly overwhelming him.

'Make for his tail, I tell you. There! stick to it—he can't hurt you, and doesn't want. It's our only chance! So!—steady! Don't get funky, Walter!—hang well back—well b— Now make for that flax bush—I'll soon be round.'

By dint of great exertion, Wild Falcon gouged a footing in Gonganui's steep, bouldery bank, and Ralph, flinging himself off, helped the monster up with all his soul and will.

Ralph loved Wild Falcon; he had won him many a steeple-

chase, and was a noted swimmer. Walter Maxwell rode a brute; it had no name or bottom either, but soon found one, and there he lay, Walter having extricated himself from underneath by a miracle.

Ferna gave them food and warm, dry blankets, and while they slept inside her hut, with peach-trees and willows waving luxuriantly in the gale and lulling them to slumber, she hung out their wet garments to dry, taking scrupulous care of each article as it tumbled out of their pockets against their waking.

The lads roused themselves on hearing the approach of her tribe, with whom they bargained for a horse. Journeying on to the next village, a pretty little half-caste girl waited upon them. She was as naïve, coy, and modest as any rustic beauty. And the lads wondered among themselves who she could be. Walter said he would stay till he found out; but whenever he went near, she gave a little scream and darted off like a frightened deer.

Chapter VII.

'Hang a thief when he's young: he'll nae steal when he's auld.'

The reckless Meteor Cowries was Nimrod's client and nephew. Something had happened. Meteor had been a Lothario; he had broken a poor, simple, confiding peasant girl's heart—a lovely creature, in the full bloom of the Old Countree's spotless maidenhood. Her heart, sir! It was broken! broken! broken!

She had pined.

He had never repented, but—he had taken to drink instead. He would not marry the poor girl, because his avocations were precarious. That is, he gambled on the Undone Vortex, in scrips and horses, shares and stocks. So his children grew around him; but they had no name.

Meteor's salary was good and on the increase. He held a position of confidence; for his employers, unaware of his proclivities, and not heeding the dangerous mine at their very feet, trusted him.

One day he was missing. Thousands of pounds were also missing from his employers' till. They prosecuted; he was convicted, and sent across the seas for several years.

They examined a book entitled 'Rules and Regulations adopted by the Committee for General Purposes' while sailing round the Vortex. They found that by virtue of one of its pro-

visions members *could not transact 'speculative business' for clerks in public or private establishments without the knowledge of their employers.* This 'knowledge' had neither been ascertained nor sought. In Quixotic innocence they appealed to the Committee of the Undone Vortex. As was to have been expected of such a Committee, the complaining partner in one of the Undone City firms was politely received, got no redress whatever; the broker, Nimrod Myrabolanes, being 'suspended' for three months, which meant nothing at all; for after a private sitting with their member, Nimrod—the complaining partner not being allowed to be present—Myrabolanes, much emboldened by his success, continued to go to the threshold of the 'House,' where he was able to inveigle more clerks, and men of grander position also, to their ruin. Clerks robbed more employers still; men of grander position lost; and the Vortex, especially such men as Nimrod, fattened at the expense, not only of honest traders in Undone City, but of quiet, guileless gentlemen in the Old Countree round.

The brokers were not all the same; but then no one could ever tell the difference; until at last it got to such a pitch, that 'outsiders,' looking at each other, would smile incredulously and say, 'What! an honest broker on the Undone Vortex!'

Chapter VIII.

'You call me still your life. O, change the word!
Life is as transient as the inconstant sigh.
Say rather I'm your soul—more, just that name;
For, like the soul, my love can never die.'—Byron.

And what about the Marchioness? Well, was there ever a naughty Marchioness? Probably. All that was ever known about Trememdon's Marchioness went to show that she was not naughty. The Marquis had wooed her for her surpassing loveliness. He had married her because he loved her. She hadn't a penny, but she had everything besides—everything the Marquis looked for—that tended to invest life with a halo of joy, of hope, and of unspeakable happiness.

And she adored the Marquis; and provided he was happy, who else had a right to complain? I never heard that anybody did. Far from that, everybody loved them both. It was easy in those days to make people love you. The servants loved them; for the jolly old Marquis had a way of his own of treating them. If any one of them, new to the place, happened by accident to

break, say, a window, and got frightened, and began to cry, especially if it were a very large one, he would call her to him, and if she hesitated, or coloured up, and looked unhappy, he would go to her and say in such a jolly tone, 'What's it matter, my dear? You couldn't help it.' Sometimes, if she were very bashful, he would kiss her jolly round shoulders, and make her laugh much louder than she had cried; and the Marchioness never ended by saying in harsh tones, 'There, there; don't do it again.' And yet she never did do it again. I often used to hear them all declare in the great old servants' hall, amidst a grand clatter of a chorus—such a chorus as you have many and many a time heard, sir—that they would die for that jolly old Marquis. And then they would fall to kissing one another; I don't know why; for want of somebody else to kiss, I suppose.

Lord Reginald Algernon Playfair was the eldest of five children. The Marquis had put him to a public school. Lord Alfred, his father's favourite boy, never left old Trememdon. Lady Eleanor Frances had her governess, while little Gertrude Eva was yet in the nursery.

A Visitant—called by some Partial Separation; by others Temporary Misery; by some, again, The Weird Destroyer; while others, putting their hands to their foreheads or their hearts, went about looking very sad, not knowing what to call It. There was a vulgar name too—Death! It had made a gap of several years between Alfred and Eleanor.

The Marquis had a brother, Lord Allan Playfair, who was Rector of Trememdon. He was one of the jolliest and most sensible parsons ever known. A great favourite at the Castle, he was constantly in and out; in fact, the homes of the two brothers seemed as one.

'Pentrevor,' the Marquis had said, when his wife's father, the Rev. Lord Adolphus, a younger son, had told him that, much as worldly position was esteemed by most, he felt proud to entrust his daughter's happiness to his keeping—that being his first consideration—'I first of all loved Beatrice; then I found we were made for one another, she to suggest and I to carry out our plans amongst and for the good of our people.' He had fallen in love one month, and married the next. When the servants and farmers all came to a two-o'clock dinner, they were all truly sorry not to be able to see the Marchioness. More ale was drunk than upon any previous gathering; for that crabbed sort of old fellow, Thorne, begged so hard for a look at the three-days-old, that Nurse brought it down into the snugly-warmed great hall for the tenantry to inspect. Flagon after

flagon of old ale disappeared in drinking to the health of a wee odd-looking thing, wrapped up so that it could scarce be seen. The cry was still for more, and more they had. These couple of hundred thirsty mouths drank so heartily, that at one time it seemed as if the cellars would run dry.

And old Thorne called baby 'The flower of Old Trememdon,' and the others, 'Old Trememdon's rose.'

'Er es so cruel prittie,' said old Thorne.

'Iss, raight solid,' all the others joined in.

Many such gatherings took place year by year as each year rolled along.

Great as was the Marquis in that part of the Old Countree, however, he never flagged in his steady, unvarying attention to the duties devolving upon him in connection with the State. His great success lay in his single-minded honesty of purpose, and in his overpowering sense of benevolence and good-will. 'Was it right or wrong ?' was the only question ever present to his mind. In those days he was thorough and painstaking, and being a deep thinker, a fearless advocate, and an exhaustive reasoner, he was listened to with interest and affection. The people, understanding him, always knew which way he would vote. Never despising a foe, often by his conciliatory manner disarming, if not convincing one, he was as catholic and benevolent in his public career as in his inner life he was irreproachable.

Chapter IX.

'Who overcomes
By force hath overcome but half his foe.'—Milton.

'Get off Falcon, Ralph,' cried Walter hoarsely. 'I'll have the devil back in no time.'

As Walter had been lazy the morning after the adventure in the Gonganui River, Ralph, after having vainly urged his brother to secure the brute, had started on alone; and the 'devil' having bolted, Walter was furious.

'I'll see you blowed first !' said Ralph. 'I told you that I wouldn't allow Falcon to be messed about all the way to that brute's old grounds. There ! look at him ! Six bucks at a time ! I know when I'm well off, thank you, Walter.'

'Then you're a ——' Walter could not finish. In his attempt to fell his brother with a blow from the saddle Ralph had almost galloped over him. They had both fallen, and now confronted each other glaring with deadly hate.

Though older and of stouter build Walter was not Ralph's equal in pluck and endurance. As exacting and unscrupulous as his brother was hot and resentful, Walter was constantly provoking feuds.

'You called me a ——.'

'And so I say you ——,' were the only words now heard.

Ralph, filled with deep and vengeful feelings, thirsted for his brother's life. That brother, conscious too of superior strength, yet hit out with all his force. Plucking up resolution as each blow got warmer, Ralph, though ever worsted at the first, made his tell at the last. Aiming straight and fiercely with dauntless spirit he always got the better of the elder in the end; but, generosity itself, the moment his brother showed signs of giving in, Ralph tendered his hand: 'There, let's be friends, Walter. I hate a row. You do so force me into it.'

Though much exhausted he then would look Walter in the face and smile, holding his brother's hand in his. But Walter would give his in manner so faint, so sideways, half with the finger tips, and pinched, with such a hard, reluctant, scraggy kind of feel that made Ralph wish he hadn't tendered his, which was a broad, warm, throbbing hand, with no crawling, shuffling half shake in it, but full and free and hearty like his own soul.

At such moments Ralph used to note a fatal, sinister expression playing around those high cheek-bones, such as made him recoil with horror at times. And with this weird expression came symptoms of subdued and inward passion—hateful if momentary. Ralph wondered why Walter had never fought it out. Fighting depended more on the eye, and nerve, and will, than on mere muscular development, and he believed at last that if a man were only resolute, he might win any battle. He hated fighting, but once the fight begun, he'd sooner die, he said, than ever give in. He never had been beaten yet because he fought with all his soul, as well as all his head. And fellows did not dare to meddle with Ralph Osborne. Dirt-begrimed with long exposure by night and day the youths had a good swim in a creek running through the native village, washing off the heat and dust of their late encounter.

Wild Falcon had been quietly walking about and feeding, first treading on his bridle, then seeing what a fool his master was for letting him, he trod more carefully, and being a gentlemanly, well-bred horse, with delicate perceptions, he never broke it. Having no desire to follow Walter's scarecrow nor keep company with inferiors he was to be found when wanted. To Ralph's surprise he was accosted by the little half-caste girl who

asked him why he did not unsaddle his horse. Presently an old chief approached, and in a good-natured way told them not to mind, for he would let them have another horse by paying a trifling difference. He was enveloped in a red blanket. Though old he was agile; he had short-cropped gray hair and a face full of tattoo and good nature. A thoroughbred native chief, he, a spectator of their recent battle, forbore to say a word. The bargain struck, Walter and he disappeared in search of an animal.

'Why, Ralph, you are about the coolest fellow I ever saw,' exclaimed Walter on his return. Ralph was a thoughtless, ardent youth, and having no idea of what he was about, had got into conversation with the little half-caste girl. In the height of his boyish admiration he had placed his arm around her slim, fair waist. The bewitching young thing had moved her lithe form from side to side, but as Ralph had held her in his strong embrace she had remained passive in his arms.

'What is the white man saying?' asked the girl.

'He wants to feel your arm; he says you must be so cold,' replied Ralph.

'Oh, white man! you know nothing at all about it,' exclaimed she; and eluding his grasp like an eel, darted off, her thin striped dress showing her well-moulded form to perfection as it fluttered in the wind.

After a hearty breakfast they were soon bidding adieu. Both the lads eyed her as Haini stood by the old chief's side, with eyes unusually bright. Ralph shook hands with old Wiremu; Walter thought he had done enough when he threw ten shillings into the bargain over the horse without making a fuss at parting.

Now the languishing little creature stands whispering into Ralph's ear,

'It was not you—it was the other white man who was to blame.' Ralph eyed her with simple amazement.

'My grandfather saw it all,' continued she; 'why travel with him if he makes you so unhappy—*you?*'

Chapter X.

'Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people.'

Now Undone city contained some very wealthy bankers, traders, and merchants of high standing and of every conceivable description. When such had to do 'business' on the Vortex they shrugged their shoulders, winced, and said, 'I wonder whether

I shall be taken in too!' They could not enter it like they could their own exchanges, such as the rice and the sugar marts, or those for corn, or coals, or cotton. And the 'outsiders' grieved thereat; for being obliged to trust to their brokers, they had no means whatever of checking their 'bargains.' At this they grumbled. The Undone Vortex was quite different to all the other marts. There was a fascination about its doings which so allured 'outsiders,' that once they had tasted its wild enslaving thralls they never could desist. Even while they were being ruined the brokers so excited them with the vain hope of the tide turning in their favour that they plunged deeper and deeper!

Sometimes their dupes made a little plunder—for it was always plunder, what one made another lost. There was no good done there, no one ever produced anything of any benefit to the rest of Undone city, or the Old Countree round. Some called it The Undone Betting-ring, while by others it was named The National Disgrace!

The flower of the youth of Undone city and of the Old Countree were always to be found congregating about the portals of the Vortex, hoping to win something for which they had never toiled, but they nearly always lost and were 'cleared out.' And they went away beggars, and looked so pale and woe-begone, for which the brokers did not care one bit! The victims, if they did not die of heart disease, generally took to drink, or poisoned or shot themselves, while many had to be confined in lunatic asylums for the remainder of their wretched lives.

At times there were what used to be called 'panics,' and then nearly everybody in Undone city, and in the Old Countree round, suffered more or less; because the insiders used to concoct and spread false reports, and frighten the poor outsiders out of their stocks, scrip, and shares, for which they had worked full many a livelong day and year. By means of what were called 'operations' on the market, dependence could never be placed on its steadiness at any time. Insiders told outsiders if the stocks they had just purchased, and paid for in hard cash, receded one or two or three per cent the day after, that it was a question of 'account.' And this happened so frequently that the poor outsiders got tired of losing continually, just to gratify the lust, greed, and cupidity of a parcel of gamesters with whom the people of the land had not a particle of sympathy, but who were, owing to the facilities thus afforded them, enabled, by preconcerted arrangement, to depreciate the property of a whole nation.

During the prevalence of these 'panics,' however, the fluctua-

tions were so violent that far greater loss and ruin inevitably ensued. As everything in the Vortex was conducted *within closed doors*, and with the utmost secrecy, no one could ever tell whether what they heard was true or false. They never could satisfy themselves by going into the Vortex—that was not allowed. The 'insiders' grew very rich; and the 'outsiders,' many of them, very poor indeed!

The Vortex possessed a committee to regulate its affairs; but as it was composed of brokers and jobbers, everything they did was to their own exclusive benefit, and not at all to that of 'outsiders' in Undone city, or of the Old Countree round; except in particular cases—*when they had friends!*

There were rules and regulations to guide the conduct of members of the Vortex. Many of them were very simple, and if not stringent enough to satisfy the requirements of a rigorous martinet, were yet capable, *if faithfully and properly administered*, of affording redress in certain cases to injured and despoiled 'outsiders,' and of satisfying the ends of justice.

Owing, however, to the system of secrecy which prevailed it was next to impossible for an aggrieved and pertinacious 'outsider' to prove their infraction. If by superhuman effort he succeeded in doing so, the committee refused to be bound by its own rules, owing to the conviction that any day it might be their turn to be summoned for infringement. It is true if a member did anything very flagrant they would expel him, especially *if he ran away from being examined* when summoned to appear, or if he did anything *by which the committee themselves would suffer loss or detriment.* Then the committee would be very quick to act. Sometimes brokers passed 'transactions' through their books by means of which '*large illegitimate profits*' were made out of an 'outsider,' and he was ruined in consequence. But nobody ever got to hear a word about it in the great city of Undone, or in the Old Countree round, as was always the case when a fraudulent transaction took place upon the cotton or other marts. Then all the newspapers in the city and the countree round would have given an accurate and what was called a 'sensational' account of it, by means of which the offenders would have been held up to ridicule and contempt, the evil-doers being sent to prison.

Thus the wrong-doers on the Vortex were privileged.

Again, if a poor, despoiled, but infuriated and indignantly desperate 'outsider' attempted to prosecute those evil-doers which the committee had justly condemned and 'posted' within the walls of the 'House' as being robbers, and connivers at spoliation, that

committee, which was supposed to exist for the purpose, among other things, of administering justice, stepped in and interfered, thus affording their powerful protection and shielding the dearly-loved, much-cherished Spoilers because they were members of the Undone Vortex, and they never knew when it might be their own turn!

'Outsiders' used to ask themselves questions. One was, Would committee-men on the Undone Vortex try to aid a pick-pocket to escape? No! Then are villains in gentlemanly caskets different in essence and in character in the eyes of the Undone Vortex Committee from robbers of the pavement, and must these be allowed to walk at large, erect, untouched?

Chapter XI.

'Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashioned so slenderly,
Young, and so fair.'—Hood.

Little Haini had never met such a gaze as Ralph Osborne's in her life. And when he was gone she felt more miserable and lonely than ever she had done before.

'Walter, do you know Colonel Trevosa?' asked Ralph, when they were leisurely descending a mountain *en route* for Middletown, enjoying the magnificent prospect and a smoke at the same time.

'I have met him, but why?' asked Walter.

'Because he is Haini's father, and I wouldn't be in his shoes. Why, that girl has a soul! See how she stepped the ground along!' said the impetuous Ralph.

'Not bad action,' was the cool rejoinder.

'Bad! why, I could trace blood in all she did and said.'

'Don't go into heroics over her, Ralph. You were born for the Church! Are you going to set about reforming a man of the world because he is a man of the world? You'll have enough on hand presently.'

But Ralph did go into heroics over the little daughter of the Old Countree officer, who lived with her mother at the native village they had just left.

'Think of little Haini,' said he; 'her soul is as yet unsoiled, but I tremble when I think of her warm, passionate nature—so tender, so fragile a thing is woman!'

'She has her mother, you know,' said Walter unconcernedly.

'And a father, too; and her father I will see.'

'Ha! you would never have done for the army. The world is round, Ralph; no preaching will ever make it square; I rather like its roundness myself. Act on the square is well enough in theory. Put it into practice, and where would you be?'

'Ah, but with a gentle girl! With a man it is different,' said Ralph excitedly.

'Well, well, 'tis bad, I admit,' replied Walter.

'I'm mad on the army, Walter, but yet I denounce those defenders of liberty when I find them guilty of having tarnished that honour which has ever attached to a soldier's name! Bravery in the field is certainly not rendered more desperate by being allied with such a consciousness!'

The lads soon arrived at the Black Horse Hotel in Middletown. Getting an introduction to the Colonel at a ball given by the Governor whom the Queen of the Old Countree had despatched to keep the natives of Fernland in order, Ralph waited his opportunity. One after another the guests were departing. Ralph helped the Colonel with his cloak. The boy admired his soldierly bearing. Trevosa liked the youth. They had exchanged cards.

'Do you walk my way, Osborne—Kiaro? a walk so refreshes you after a hop.'

They stept briskly along the broad quay in silence. The sun had just caught Himataka's silvern top; soon it was half way down the grand old mountain.

> 'Gorgeous in sunshine, frowning at night,
> E'en after gloaming radiant with light,'

muttered the boy abstractedly. Ralph was unusually quiet.

The Colonel turned and said, 'Where did you find those lines, Osborne?'

'I fear they escaped me,' said Ralph, quietly smiling at his companion.

'Oh! pray go on,' urged Trevosa.

> 'True beacon to mariners caught in the storm,
> And the traveller's landmark far, far from his home,'

said Ralph, eyeing the distant peak with youthful admiration.

'Oh, but give me your refrain, my boy.'

Ralph looked at the soldier for a moment; then gazing towards the mountain, extended his arm:

> 'Wooniwha haunts thee, they tell; still give me
> Old Fernland's gaunt Alp gleaming bright o'er the sea!'

'Why, Osborne, you're quite a poet—you are indeed! Do you ever write?'

Ralph gazed once more upon the superb-looking soldier in admiring silence; the Colonel yearned towards the boy as to a son. Trevosa had a formidable look. His eye had a penetrating, ominous twinkle; the very man, thought Ralph, of all others to have a row with. It would be soon over, or the beginning of a fiercer quarrel.

'I have no heart to write,' said he, in reply to the question put by the Colonel. 'Did I try to breathe my soul upon the page the words would refuse to come. Could some phantom spirit extract their little worth, give forth their tender glow, and stamp it on the page! But ah! the morning of my waking thought arrives—it all looks cold and meagre. I do despise it so—my thoughts, I mean.'

He paused. Not one faint zephyr breathed to agitate the deep blue waters of the noble harbour as they laved the foot of the majestic snow-clad mountain. The eastern sky was now aflame. Slanting rays shot right across their path. The air was brisk and clear. The soul-inspiring waltz had lent its aid to rouse the boy to feelings of passionate ardour, and encircle him with a halo of fervid romance. Presently the soldier said abstractedly,

'Thoughts? I hate to think.'

'Hate to—'

'Yes, yes, don't say another word; let's go, my boy.'

> 'Screw your courage to the sticking-place,
> And we'll not fail,'

thought Ralph. With flashing eyes, with kindling face and passionate eagerness, he then told the soldier how that he had met with his pretty little fairy child Haini, that she languished for want of care and thoughtful tenderness; and while he begged him to take her from that wretched native village, Trevosa looking defiance and smelling of powder in a moment, Ralph stood his ground manfully, and battled inch by inch for little Haini.

'She has a soul in her worthy of you, Trevosa: nay, Colonel, you must hear me; she steps the ground along as proudly as do you, Trevosa. She's your own flesh and blood.'

Both were silent. The soldier no longer eyed the boy, but Ralph looked at him with ever-changeful thoughts. His outburst had been vehement. Each word was a barbed arrow. Trevosa was shortly going to be married to a lady from the Old Countree. The situation bristled with difficulties, but his was a heart loyal, warm, and leal, worthy of the Old Countree from

which it had sprung. He had watched the tear glisten in the boy's eye, and inwardly admired his manly courage. And now their eyes have met. Ralph warmly clasps in both of his the soldier's proffered hand. He watches a tear roll down his manly cheek; Trevosa hears a tremor in Ralph's voice as each the other bids farewell, and from that hour changes poor, gentle, little Haini's fate. And Colonel Trevosa and Ralph Osborne are warm friends.

Chapter XII.

'Get money; still get money, boy,
No matter by what means.'—Ben Jonson.

Little thinking of what the consequences might be, the mother of the two boys gladly availed herself of the opportunity afforded by the departure for the Old Countree of Mr. Linksigh Dooum, one of those clever land sharks which were always to be met with in the days I'm speaking of, and entrusted her son Walter to his keeping until his choice in life should be made. She was anxiousto separate her boys on account of the difference in their dispositions; and warning Walter that he was fast getting to resemble an old Sir Walter Maxwell, his father's ancestor, whose cupidity was unbridled, and who was a scamp in every sense, she bade him farewell.

As soon as Walter landed in the Old Countree, he made for Undone City, and was speedily drawn to the Vortex. Linksigh introduced him to the great banking firm of Grab Brothers, in Money Street, who finding him very 'cute indeed soon got him on to the Undone Vortex. Cervill Todi Grab, or Todigrab as he was commonly called, was Walter's especial patron. Walter soon found himself *au fait* at all 'business' matters, and, becoming a Vortex broker, seconded Todigrab in his schemes. He helped him to 'float' the Metal Mountains Debenture Swindle, the Empirical Land Company of Southville ditto, the Wee Countree Public Robbery Company ditto, and many others. But this was too slow for Walter; he began to launch out on his own account. He was now not very long in losing a good round sum of hard cash, and was severely 'bitten;' but being sharp he soon mastered the art of biting others in turn—'Bitten by a Vampyre makes a Vampyre.'

By chance one day Walter met Raskall Clencher, who was quite up to Vortex 'business.' Having since the time he was

herein first introduced been a little 'eccentric,' and made a *faux pas* or two, he had been again and again out of employ, and was therefore hungry and more ready to devour than ever.

As Raskall could no longer enter the 'House,' he agreed to come with Walter for a time at a yearly 'screw' and teach him more of 'the ways.' Walter had a large array of clients; among them ten or a dozen swells in the army of the Old Countree. He now dropped the 'broker' and became a Vortex 'parasite,' preferring this on account of the opportunities it afforded him of being down at every race in the Old Countree and many foreign countrees, as well as to every fête, ball, rowing-match, and amusement of every kind worth attending.

His office, which swarmed with 'clients,' was in a very good position. In his private room there was always something to drink for every change in temperature for thirsty 'clients,' and 'clients' as a rule nearly always were thirsty, their 'occupation' being exciting. Many a poor 'outsider' owed his fall to this influence.

Mixing as he had now been doing for years with so many men in and about the Vortex, Walter soon acquired a peculiar mannerism. He became, in a certain kind of way, polished, dashing, subtle, and clever. As yet his 'clients' were from among the clubs of the West-end of Undone exclusively, or picked up at various races, &c. There was an unmistakable 'stamp' about them. Walter partook of that character. Meeting them casually you might have taken them for anything, from a mounted police-officer in private clothes to a prince in disguise. They were, without being invidious, fast, though, as a rule, highly honourable. With them a sporting bet was as sacred an engagement as those entered into on the Vortex, and *vice versâ*. Walter sighed for a good county connection. He had engaged the services of Raskall Clencher because he could prove useful, and promised well in this respect. Walter thought to keep him at arm's length. He did not pay him a high 'screw' at first, but Clencher thought he knew his man, and that was sufficient for him.

Walter would listen to no remonstrance; he knew Clencher's antecedents, and defying the world, that world soon fawned at his feet, reconciling itself with things as Walter made them; and making money very fast, Clencher rose not only in his estimation, but in that of many of his 'clients' also.

One rule Clencher now always observed; if he did not invariably act on the square, he always took particular care not to act off the old squares which had brought him to old griefs.

Walter got an introduction from Todigrab to the great firm of Undone merchants, Catzpore and Fleasum, of Aurum Factors, Dooum Easy Lane. This firm sighed for an opportunity by which it might inveigle the inhabitants of Undone and the whole of the Old Countree round; and owing to the great and unerring sagacity of Todigrab, they had not long to pine. He 'used' them, and they, becoming his tools, did his dirty work; while he, working in the dark and irresponsibly, pocketed the lion's share of the plunder. Thus his bank, unlike their offices, did not at any time resemble a bill-sticker's hoarding, but was kept free of Spoilers' prospectuses.

And so between such men as Todigrab, Maxwell, and Catzpore and Fleasum, swindling loans were foisted upon the unwary inhabitants of Undone City and of the Old Countree, which loans were endorsed by the Committee, and sanctioned by them, and countless thousands were ruined by these and similar undertakings. Widows and orphans who placed reliance in the character and judgment of the Committee were thus reduced to poverty, and obliged to eat the bread of carefulness all the remainder of their days!

Young girls, too, just stepping upon the platform of life, ardent, eager, and impassioned—certainly the *equals* of the Arch-spoiler's daughter, for no ancestors of theirs had ever been competitors in the race after ill-gotten wealth—had thus their hopes blighted and their brightest prospects in life blasted, even while the fair bud of promise was making its first tiny attempt at shadowing forth the charming excellence with which it was endowed.

These Spoilers were masters in the art of monetary strategy, building palaces with the spoils of their victims; lavishing money upon any object which their whim or caprice suggested, and indulging in costly entertainments—for they had no heart to feel for the sorrows and ruin occasioned by misdeeds which told of the spoliation upon which they fattened, the legalised robbery by which they had grown rich. There were very many honourable men in Undone City who had long been sick and tired of the doings in the Vortex. These men could not see why the City should be any longer disgraced and polluted by a perpetuation of such evils. It was talked over again and again, but nothing ever came of it. Occasionally Swindlers were prosecuted, but very seldom punished. What were called 'compromises' were made, and lies committed to paper, by which the robbers paid a certain sum on condition of being what was called 'whitewashed;' proceedings were stayed, and the robbers were thus enabled to start

on again in the same career, avoiding the 'old square,' but never acting on the new.

Generally, too, the victims were impoverished and heart-broken. They used to sit at home, if they had such a thing left, and sigh over their wretched fates. While the Spoilers went on from scheme to plan, and defying everybody again, succeeded by the most consummate devices in heaping spoil upon spoil, and reducing others in their turn to beggary.

Thus the Undone Vortex was all-powerful. Whenever anything was whispered round, it was speedily hushed, for everybody seemed too frightened to stir, or even speak. They all lay like men spell-bound. *Why*, the Spectre never could understand, unless it was for fear of THE LAW OF LIBEL.

Ah! how I did pity them!

How it was the sob from pretty lips which haunted me determined my course, is yet to tell.

CHAPTER XIII.

'O for a lodge in some vast wilderness,
Some boundless contiguity of shade,
Where rumour of oppression and deceit,
Of unsuccessful or successful war,
Might never reach me more!'—COWPER.

RALPH had no desire to accompany his brother Walter to the Old Countree, and he chose a different field for his exertions. Settling down in a new and prosperous district near Southtown, with flocks and herds around him in great abundance; occasionally visiting his mother, who was superintending the education of her little daughter Emma Louise Osborne up in Northtown, yet never losing sight of his little pet, as he called her, who through his instrumentality was now put to a school in Middletown, where he sometimes met her out walking,—years glided swiftly by.

Once he called upon Miss Jay, to beg for permission to take Haini through some difficult pass up a rapid in one of Fernland's wildest districts—he requiring a guide, he said. But this lady did not view matters in that light, and it was only when her headaches became distracting, and she was sent on a visit to the Hon. Johnson Doowell's (she would never visit at her father's since he married the Old Countree lady) till she recovered, that Ralph was allowed to indulge his romantic passion for paddling about with the fascinating little half-caste girl, in a canoe half full of water, which she would bale out with great dexterity. But those wild

adventures, sometimes in the heart of Fernland's stupendous scenery, at others out at sea in half a gale of wind, were productive of harm to the soldier's daughter, if of interest and amusement to Ralph; for while he studied what he imagined her pretty little eccentricities, the impassioned child was fast becoming enslaved by a devouring passion.

It was after a more than usually adventurous expedition, during which, in order to avoid being benighted in a Far Countree where no twilight prevails, Ralph had carried Haini in his arms out of the canoe across a big flax-swamp to a native village, that she resolutely, though with changing colour and beating heart, declined to accompany him any more. Ralph had come to propose an unheard-of exploit. 'I am getting too old now, Ralph,' she sighed, 'and am a child no longer' and then abruptly left the room. Ralph sorrowfully yielded.

Year succeeded year, still Ralph had not married. He used to say to himself, 'If I do not find her, I will remain as I am, and —dream of her! If she exists—and we were made for each other —we shall meet. To marry without I loved—oh, never!'

Ralph now took his mother and Emma Louise to the Old Countree, but finding it very quiet and not at all what he expected, after spending two years with them, he returned by way of several other Far Countrees to the land of his adoption. He had seen but little of Walter, though he thought him much improved. He was getting to be a rising man, and was doing something in Undone city. Being very fond of adventure Ralph now explored every glacier, lake, mountain, and river in Fernland, but this time without Haini; and then pined for something new.

Preparing to revisit the Old Countree, and then start he knew not whither, the overseer of his estates fell ill, and he necessarily deferred his departure for some little time.

Calling one day upon Colonel Trevosa, he was introduced to a kinsman of his, a young nobleman, who was then on a round of pleasure, visiting several Far Countrees.

Trememdon's race was ever bold, and the Marquis's second son thought nothing of going a long way out of the routes of ordinary pleasure-seekers. His yacht, the Sybil, lay at anchor in Middletown harbour. Lord Alfred Ernest Playfair had now grown into a very handsome fellow. He possessed not only great personal beauty and a noble exterior, but, while warm and ardent like the old Marquis his father, he was even more gifted and adorned by nature and education; and, as a consequence, was much loved and sought after. His craft was a model, and fully worthy of its noble owner.

Arrived in Middletown, Lord Alfred was at once made welcome by the people of Fernland, who were Old Countree at heart. Sprung from a good old stock, they gloried in nothing so much as in all that represented her greatness. When Ralph Osborne gazed upon Lord Alfred's noble features, luxuriated in the delights inspired by conversation which, while it was refined, was free from pedantry, and basked in the sunshine of a smile which captivated his heart, he asked himself, 'Oh, can it be that I have at length found the man for whom I have been looking so long, and despaired of ever meeting; to whom I am feeling daily, hourly drawn, as by a cord so silken, so unusually sympathetic, as to be almost imperceptible; a man in whom I think I see a deep and tender sentiment curbed, controlled, moulded, and strengthened by a manly firmness to such an extent that the world which searches not imagines that that brusque exterior contains no gem within? Is he the man with cultivated intelligence, with generous sympathies—the man I can call by the sacred name of friend? If he be not all this to me, or call him duke or call him prince, he is nothing to me; if he is all this to me, then he and I are one!'

* * * * * * *

And Lord Alfred and Ralph Osborne were friends. They revelled in the grandeur and vastness of Fernland's awe-inspiring outlines; and Lord Alfred was charmed and fascinated with Fernland, and with its bright, manly, warm-hearted inhabitants, whilst for its natives he experienced an affection not second even to Ralph's.

When Ralph introduced him to Haini Trevosa as his supremest of pets, Lord Alfred started. 'What! the Colonel's daughter?' asked he.

'The same,' said Haini quietly; and for some moments nothing could be heard but the distant clank of some homeward bound ship in the harbour weighing her anchor, so silent were they. But Lord Alfred, who was his father's second self, soon began with 'My pretty little cousin!' and embracing her reverentially—Haini blushing deeply the while—kissed both her little hands. Ralph looked up; Haini was in tears, but smiling through them, and no one spoke a word.

'Oh, come!' suddenly broke in the exuberant young lord, leading her by the hand across the drawing-room of the Hon. Johnson Doowell. 'Come, I'm so glad I've heard of this. We'll have Maude and you, Haini, my pet, on board—won't we, Ralph?—and start for a cruise somewhere. Wouldn't you like that, Haini?'

But Haini said she thought she wouldn't. She had never seen

her new little sister Maude yet; for though the Colonel's wife very much wished to see her, she never would go up—it was her father's love she wanted. Ralph, thoughtless as ever, pressed her, however, and Haini, casting one glance towards him, and meeting his gaze—so like that fiery look of old—consented.

'I'm sure Miss Jay is working you too hard; the "out" will do you good, Haini; and Playfair, she will be capital up those mountain gorges through the rapids, and if we should have a spill, you cling to her if you can't swim, for she can, like a—little duck—and then——'

'Oh, does she?' returned the other; but Haini was disconcerted, and Ralph felt sorry, for his ought to have been grateful silence. Never but once had he seen her bewitching form in the water. The canoe having capsized on a rocky island spit, with the tide rising, she had plunged in, and stemming the mountain torrent had gained the opposite shore of a big river, and thus procuring assistance had rescued him from certain destruction.

'Ah, I was only nine then, Lord Alfred!' said Beauty, with a heavenly blush. 'I'm grown up now; I'm growing—so old.'

'Isn't she learning to speak prettily?' said Ralph. 'Thanks to Ralph I am, Lord Alfred,' interposed she. 'Why Ralph, and not Alfred?' asked the young lord, addressing his fair cousin. 'Oh, I've known him so long—so very long!' replied the girl dreamily.

'Because you are so old—so very old?' asked he gaily. 'Well, my pretty cousin, all things take time; I'll give you yours with the sweetest pleasure in life,' added he, looking into her wondrous eyes with earnest curiosity.

'Thank you, *Alfred*,' added she naïvely, her large lustrous eyes glittering, and her frame trembling at the effort.

'My pretty pet, my pretty cousin, come, come along, and let us take little Maude by storm,' said he in rapture.

'Oh, no—no—not up there!' cried Haini passionately, her face flushing scarlet. 'Bring my little sister down here. I long to see and to love her—but not up there; I know Miss Jay will let me go with her; they all so want me to love her.'

Chapter XIV.

'The memory of the just is blessed; but the name of the wicked shall rot.'

Captain Oswald Slasher, late of the 19th Blazers, popularly known as Blazes Slasher, was a client of Walter Maxwell's, as was the Honourable Frederick Stanley, his cousin. With Harry Somers, late Captain in a Bungaland or Hot Countree Regiment, they formed as noisy and larky a trio as could well be imagined. As long as Somers confined his libations to the within side of moderation he was pleasant and entertaining; having had a sun-stroke he became very excitable when giving an account of his losses. Fred Stanley was diminutive as contrasted with either Somers or Slasher—a free and joyous spirit, with a pleasant face and engaging manner; he had a charming lisp, and was always ready for any amount of fun and mischief. Though a younger son he rolled in money, and was possessed of but one fatal hallucination, in which he was greatly encouraged by Maxwell—that he could whenever he liked make a 'pot' of money on the Undone Vortex. In this, like so many others, he was entirely mistaken, for he nearly always lost, and yet could never leave it alone. As a consequence he was voted a great bore by his friends, for to make up his fortnightly 'differences' he was forced to apply to them; thus forestalling his very considerable fortune, and throwing it in the dirt, which was in their eyes the same thing as spending it upon the Undone Vortex, its Brokers and Parasites.

Slasher was of very old family, and heir to a very old baronetcy. He differed from Sir Watt Scroughem, Bart., another of Maxwell's clients, also of exceedingly old family, in that, while Sir Watt possessed but little besides his name—an exceedingly valuable commodity in connection with the 'floating' of many of Walter's 'concerns'—he was also heir to a heavy rent-roll.

Slasher had tried broker after broker with one almost invariable result—he lost! and old Sir Oswald was much grieved thereat, for he had to supply the funds. Fred Stanley never appeared much discomposed at his losses; at the approach of the 'account' he would stroll into his banker's at the West-end of Undone, and ask in a delightfully innocent way:

'I thay—got any money o' mine?' It would have been the same to him if they had not. A clerk who knew the lad well invariably replied:

'I'll see, sir, if you take a seat.'

'Oh, coth I thought you might have.'

And if they had not it was amusing to see the shifts he was put to to meet his engagements punctually.

All was now excitement with the trio. The great banking house of Grab Brothers had brought out a succession of gigantic swindles; but they were fast becoming matters of history. Almost simultaneously, however, Todigrab on the one hand, and Catzpore and Fleasum ostensibly on the other, were engaged in 'floating' the then notorious Beloved Silver Mine and 'Backaway' Loans. Both were well 'supported' in the 'House.' But it remains to be seen what became of them. It is needless to say that the trio became enormous 'bulls' of both if Maxwell were an interested party, and Maxwell was interested. Sir Watt Scroughem would gladly have 'lent his name' for a consideration to either undertaking had it been possible; but he was too late for the one and the other did not require any, for it had the names of a firm of merchants to father it, a name which at one time was second to none in the City of Undone, but which was soon destined to be for ever associated with broken hearts, desolate hearths, and corpses rotting on a foreign strand! And on their tombs were writ in blood the dreadful words—

BACKAWAY DELUDED VICTIMS!!

Chapter XV.

'—*Alone!* that worn-out word,
So idly spoken, and so coldly heard;
Yet all that poets sing, and grief hath known
Of hopes laid waste, knells in that word ALONE.'—LYTTON.

It wanted but a few days to Lord Alfred's departure. Maude was back again with her father, after having visited with her sister and two friends nearly every part of the rugged coast of Fernland, the natives making them welcome, without one thought of recompense. The young lord treated them as his friends, and welcomed them on board the Sybil wherever she went, for he found he was amongst Nature's gentlemen! When the men went ashore, leaving the yacht to meet them at a given spot, the Fernese cooked, and trilled the while their gentle note of sympathy for the white man. All they had was theirs, and all they looked for in return was—friendliness! too glad to serve them, and too rejoiced to think they'd helped—the stranger!

Haini and her two companions were engaged talking in the room where Lord Alfred had first made his cousin's acquaintance. Ralph was discussing old times with Haini, and inwardly rejoicing, notwithstanding Walter's sneers, in having had the good fortune to secure for her the advantages to which she was entitled.

Lord Alfred had just complimented her on what he called her good sea-going qualities. Before the blush had quite died from her thoughtful pensive face he exclaimed:

'Why, here comes yourself, Ralph!—yes, up the avenue, I do declare! Haini, look! Why, isn't it Ralph?' said he excitedly. He had only just turned towards the window, which commanded a splendid prospect of the beautiful harbour. Ralph thought—could it be? No—yes; it must be he!

In a moment more Walter Maxwell's card was handed in, and in another he appeared.

The likeness between the half-brothers was exact in repose—it was fatal—yet, when animated, all traces passed away. Lord Alfred was fairly taken aback, and, after the few brief words of salutation, lapsed into silence. Haini was equally reserved.

But Walter was altogether unlike his former self. His manner was easy and well-bred. Explanations were made. He had come over, he said, on pressing affairs in connection with Fernland: 'Land, Railways, Steamers, Mills; in a word—Great Companies!'

'Are you a Speculator?' asked Ralph eagerly.

'They call me so,' said the other, with reserve; 'and when "the New Act" comes into operation Fernland is made—a fact!'

'I think it is making pretty fast without,' quietly interposed Lord Alfred.

'Opinions differ, my lord. Fernland is yet in its infancy. Wait until I get my New Companies under weigh: then we shall see if Fernland will not stand more "making" with advantage. Fernland is only beginning a grand, a magnificent career, my lord,' said Walter, with all the *empressement* of a Financier, and then asked in an easy manner:

'Do you make a long stay, Lord Alfred?'

'Under a week, I think, at present,' replied he.

'The Sybil's a smart vessel,' remarked Walter.

'Well enough. Do you stay long?' from his Lordship.

'We passed her the other day in the Whangahine, just off Smooth Island. You were on a wind, and were going a great pace, and—what a model! Oh—me? Well, I've a few contracts

to sign—business, my lord,—and then I'm off,' said he, tapping his foot with his cane.

Haini felt reassured by Walter's nonchalant, easy manner; indeed his arrival was quite an event to the little party.

What, thought Ralph, had not City life and manners done for Walter! Why, the man was transformed—metamorphosed!

Seeing the effect he had produced, Walter became brilliant, sparkling, and witty, yet at times maintained a quiet, grave reserve. A thorough man of the world, thought Ralph, and so important too!

Little wonder that Ralph inwardly resolved that very moment to leave the backwoods, turn Christian,—he didn't know one bit what he was,—go to the Old Countree, get into Undone City somewhere, and—ah, but then poor, dear Haini! It was all too sad. What was life indeed? So full of—what? Changes?—that's not the word; vicissitudes?—sounds foolish. Hearts enlarging almost to bursting, embracing all they loved so dearly; yet they had no sooner got them well inside than one by one they began to go out—one one way, another another; and Ralph was, or very soon would be—quite alone! And poor little Haini—what about her?

Chapter XVI.

'So lonely 'twas, that God Himself
Scarce seemed there to be.'—Coleridge.

Lord Alfred Playfair was gone! And Ralph Osborne—smoked the more! Unsentimental Ralph! And was he so? Ah, would to the God of Heaven he had been—and yet he smoked the more! Smoked till the deep, pungent fumes, impregnating his brain, nigh lulled to stupor! Why? Lord Alfred was handsome, truly; indeed Ralph could hardly ever take his eyes off him. No doubt these two men felt a charm in each other's society. Ralph asked himself, What constitutes a charm? and what continues it? Is it a sense of power in one which the other lacks, of virtue which the other does not inherit, or some manner almost divine of exercising both? or is it an appreciation merely of faculties which are in the one developed and in the other latent still? Why did he like Lord Alfred? he asked himself. It was not because—God forbid! it was not that! Besides, he did not care one fig for lords in name who were not lords in character. And then, who knows but he might have been sailing his own yacht round the world as Lord Ralph Osborne, had not

an ancestor of his put down his name to a deed—a death warrant of a King of the Old Countree!

'This was the most, the unkindest cut of all;'

and otherwise conducted himself with such intensest zeal and ardour as to cost him dear liberty and life!

'I do not set my life at a pin's fee.'

As his old ancestor's proclivities debarred him from doing the grand and sailing round the world in a smart fore-and-after, he made the best of it, and could be jolly, paddling his own canoe, or a native's, up and down Fernland's rapids, or out at sea with as bonnie a little cox as ever mortal wished to keep her steady, bale her out when she shipped a sea, give the word of command, and steer her to a secure haven.

Lord Alfred had a charm of manner, Ralph said to himself; but manner very often charms only—to betray! Ralph had often heard of charming men before, had read of them in books, of men who proved a very charm to one another, and long had he looked for one. Never till now had he met in living flesh and blood what in his ideas personified consummate charmingness; a man who, judging from his words and deeds—unfailing tests—soared high above the common herd, whose charm consists, say, in leading dupes to Misfortune Dire!

Such men as Lord Alfred Playfair, thought Ralph, prove sources of real delight and happiness unmixed; while their base counterfeits, rendering themselves by fascination of manner and of person more odious and more despicable than had such charms been absent, cause true hearts to recoil with ready suspicion from all charming men whatever. There was a charm about Lord Alfred Playfair resembling that which most men love in women—a something within the man's bosom so unlike other men's—so like a woman's tender, loving nature, and yet unlike a woman's heart in this: that, brave as woman's heart may be, his bravery was steady, calm, unmoved! He thought, could such a creature only become a woman,—such wondrous charm of manner, such handsomeness, such frankness, such eager, free exuberance of soul, —ah, no, it could not be! And then he thought no more about it,—that is, he tried. But ever and anon the thoughts would come. What thoughts? Ralph's thoughts?—as well attempt to catch the wind! Ralph's thoughts were all on Women. First they clustered around Beauty, then they reclined on Women; they then fell back on Beauty, and now they're on Women again! Could there only be a Lady Alfred Playfair!

'A Lady Alfred Playfair?' I breathed into the poor boy's ear. 'Why, yes, of course there can, and will be, doubtless, some fine day!'

The noxious weed had done its work; he heard me not, but muttered:

'Yes, a girl just like Lord Alfred—the image, its counterpart; then I should, yes, I, Ralph Osborne, would—but no, there cannot be—a Lady Alfred Playfair!'

And still Ralph Osborne smoked the more.

Chapter XVII.

'War, war is still the cry, even to the knife.'—Byron.

Within a short while of the departure of the Sybil for the Old Countree, Ralph had some very old friends staying with him. Frank Fullheart and his father had been boys together, and on the death-bed of the latter his friend had promised to look after the boy if ever he came in his way, but had never told him of it. He had such wild, passionate longings, his father said, and yet a woman's softest, kindest heart within. He never forgot his vow; and an opportunity occurring he had set sail, in company with his wife, for Fernland, where they were warmly welcomed by the object of their solicitude.

Frank Fullheart was a man of business in Undone City, and could not be spared for long. In the trip to the Antipodean Far Countree he had combined business with pleasure—not in 'floating' great companies, but in promoting the more solid interests of commerce.

Taking passage in a steamer then bound for Middletown, the three now left Southtown together.

Ralph called upon Colonel Trevosa immediately on their arrival, for the edict had gone forth.

'My sentence is for open war.'—Milton.

The bugle was even then sounding as Ralph quickened his steps up the hill towards the barracks.

'The Colonel is off to the Old Countree with his wife and little Maude—do not know where Haini is—better try the other flat, where her aunt lives,' was all the intelligence he gleaned there.

The ——th Regiment, two companies, 300 strong, were

then marching down to the harbour to start that very day for Westland.

'But what for?' asked Mrs. Fullheart of him, on hearing the news.

'To support ——,' Ralph stopped.

'An unrighteous claim, I hear,' interposed she.

'But I must fight,' he urged.

'I suppose you must, Ralph, but I hear the claim to the land is unjust.'

'I hate unjust wars,' cried he.

'Though in a righteous no heart so full of zeal,' said Mrs. Fullheart; 'go, my boy—go!'

As in duty bound Ralph fought with his corps in several actions against the natives, helped to carry his dying comrades to the rear amidst showers of balls; but seeing no prospect of a termination to the strife, he resolved to quit it and the land of his adoption for ever.

Meeting the Fullhearts, who had postponed their departure solely on his account, the lady begged him to give his ideas on the subject of the war.

'Well, I suppose it was to vindicate ——'

'What, Ralph?'

'The honour of ——,' he stops.

'The honour of the Old Countree?' exclaimed she with the utmost warmth; 'for ever no! Why, Ralph, neither the honour of the Old Countree nor Her power was ever doubted until she precipitated both into that Slough of Despond—that unholy strife for a block of land which was never Hers, and which She has at length yielded back, trampled and soddened with the blood of friend and foe, to Her relentless, revengeful enemy!'

As they passed the broad quay of Middletown, ever on the watch for news of any kind from the seat of war, a telegram arrived from head-quarters. The news had reached them from the seat of government, and was eagerly devoured by the excited throng. If they were humbled the spirit of the Fernland people was never broke, though in strife the weaker ever goes to the wall. The very direness of the calamity had brought best blood to the front. Hope never deserted them.

'Ha! d'ye hear?' exclaimed she, almost in rapture. '"Self-reliance" is henceforth to be your watchword.'

'Then I'm content, and I shall stay and fight it out,' cried the excited youth.

Just then a voice among the crowd was heard to shout, in tones of exultation,

'Ha, Albion! take back your troops!—ten thousand splendid creatures strong! We'll finish to the bitter end, with stern devotion, what you, in childish ignorance, began!' And back came the Old Countree's soldiers!

Chapter XVIII.

'Breathes there the man with soul so dead
Who never to himself hath said,
"This is my own, my native land"?
Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned
As home his footsteps he hath turned
From wandering on a foreign strand?
If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
For him no minstrel raptures swell.
High though his titles, proud his name,
Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
Despite those titles, power, and pelf,
The wretch, concentred all in self,
Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
And, doubly dying, shall go down
To the vile dust from whence he sprung
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung.'—Scott.

Ralph Osborne loved his mother, and she was dying.

As they retraced their steps to the Black Horse Hotel, they met a messenger with a letter marked 'immediate.' Ralph opened it; it was from his little sister Emma Louise, and contained the sad intelligence.

'Ah,' he said to the kind lady at his side, 'now, indeed, I must hasten home—and perhaps catch her parting blessing, soothe her dying pillow, and, holding her warm, wan hand in my own, list to her last murm'ring prayer!'

She was visibly affected. 'Yes,' said she, 'let us go at once, lest it should prove too late!'

His kind friends were deeply interested in the account he had given of the gentle, lovely Haini. During his absence at the seat of war her father had returned from the Old Countree, and was dead—butchered by natives! They waylaid him during six weeks, and had at length succeeded; and thus her mother's death, which she had met following the fortunes of her tribe, had been revenged. Such were some of the miseries engendered by this wretched war—a little one of the Old Countree's!

'Could I but only see dear little Haini before we start!' he said, in plaintive tones to Mrs. Fullheart, four days before their departure.

'Do try, my boy,' said she, 'and bring her with you. I long to see your little pet.'

'She's not my little pet exactly,' said Ralph, colouring; he couldn't bear another to call her so.

'Well, she's mine—bring her, there's a good fellow,' said the kind-hearted lady, pushing his heavy locks of fair curly hair back from off his forehead.

'I will, I will,' cried he, and out he started to have another search.

He had been out for hours, and was returning pensively along the broad quay of Middletown harbour. The wind was high, the rain almost incessant, and he was drenched to the skin. No one was out. He had turned a bend in the road, and twice abstractedly had caught sight of a female figure in advance of him. It was one not easily forgotten; the second gaze brought even Ralph Osborne down from the clouds. She was dressed in deep black. She had recognised him, and was retreating. Ralph beckoned her to wait. The rain descended in torrents, and the wind— 'Twas Middletown!—umbrellas were nowhere, and never used. Haini is tossed about ruthlessly: Ralph is soon by her side, however, and asking in tender accents,

'Haini! why running so, my child?'

But Haini is silent, and turns her face away.

'Let's get into a sheltered spot—here, under this gateway. Come, come along.'

He takes her by the arm and guides her up under a large building, free from the wind and rain. Neither speaks a word. He watches her countenance, now grown so wan and pale, but cannot muster courage to utter a word. He could not talk about the weather. Some people never begin nor end a speech without.

'Oh, what a lovely day! so charming, isn't it? A little warmer than it was too. I do hope it will keep so to the end, it's so pleasant! It wasn't fine yesterday—not all the day, but Monday was beautiful, so was Saturday week; I wonder whether it will be fine to-morrow—I hope it will to-morrow week;' and so they go on. In Fernland, people did not talk about weather; if it was wet, 'twas very wet—if fine, 'twas fine indeed, and generally it was fine.

These two children knew it was squally, and that was why they were under the gateway. Ralph had much to ask. At his request, the squall being over, they walked again, but neither had courage to begin. Down came the rain again.

'Speak, my poor, poor child,' gently implored he.

And now for the first time their eyes have met—the half-

caste girl's with those of the vigorous warm-blooded fellow at her side. Her pallid features light up instantly. Her eyes shoot glances into his soul, yet neither speaks. The bitter squalls descend, while each walks on mechanically.

'Haini,' at length he says, 'you must come under shelter—come to my friends; they long to see——'

'Shelter under a white man's roof!' the indignant girl exclaimed. Her face was livid, while his paled in turn. He muttered incoherently—he knew not what he said.

'The Fernland native requires no shelter—and shelter from such as you!' she cried convulsively, bursting into tears. 'Oh, Ralph, Ralph, Ralph! I know not what I'm saying!' And now she added, in a voice subdued and low as it had been impassioned and vehement before,

'Yes, come with me, dear Ralph.'

'Anywhere with you, dear Haini, anywhere.'

Ralph had a motto—only one.

'Where lovely woman leads there will Ralph Osborne follow.' And Haini led the way. Ralph followed, wondering what would be the upshot. They were both very young, and luckily for him Haini was very innocent. She knew nothing about what she was doing; conscious of one fact alone, and that was everything to her—he was by her side.

She lingered opposite a small white house in a quiet part of the town.

'Good-bye, Ralph,' said Haini.

'Good-bye!' exclaimed he, at length finding his tongue; 'but, Haini, I have so much to ask. I— oh, when shall we meet again? to-night, to-morrow? Say when, my child, before we part.' But Haini was silent.

'Tell me, my poor, poor child, mayn't we meet to-morrow? or——'

'To-morrow—come here,' said she, in choking accents, and her face, just now so animated, blanched even more than before.

'Then I will come to-morrow—will you?' She still was silent.

'I will at any rate.' He put out his hand, her well-formed little one nestled in it, her bright eye scrutinising his wondering face, and—she was gone! She closed the door of the small white house; he looked up at the blinds, and seeing nothing, made for his hotel, mud-stained, dejected, and discomposed.

'Well, who would have thought it?' he said to Mrs. Fullheart, as he sipped his third tumbler of punch in the comfortable parlour of the hotel that evening. 'What a fool I was not to have taken her in my arms, like I did once!'

'But you repented it ever afterwards,' interposed the lady; 'and you do not mean anything serious with your little pet, that is evident.'

'Well, anyhow I will—yes, to-morrow I will——'

'You will go and look the little half-caste girl up, and if she tells you anything unpleasant, you will kiss her pretty little hand and say something soothing to her, Ralph,' said the lady, smiling.

The morrow came. Ralph had knocked at the small white house. The blinds were down. Tired, perhaps, thought he. He knocked six times—a seventh. Feet pattered, but no one came. He kicked and knocked. The door was now opened by a very old Ferna, who asked him whether it was not time to go to bed?

'Bed be damned! What the devil——'

'Oh, white man!' cried she, dolefully. 'Haini has not come home all night; her strong boots are gone. I got no sleep; I'm going to try now, for I am old, and sad, and weary.'

'Friend! where is Haini?' thundered he, pushing the door wide open; 'tell me, or I will search the house.'

'White man, come in and find her—I wish I could,' said Ferna, opening the door wide. 'Poor Haini! she will not return for many a week.'

She now told him that Haini had joined the rebels (?), that she carried letters to and fro, up and down the coast, eluding suspicion on account of her sex, and had never been quite right since her father's death, refusing all intercourse with her white relations and sympathisers with the Queen's cause.

'Oh, white man, Haini is a true soldier's daughter—so brave, so wise, and with all her mother's love for the native too.'

Ralph had heard enough. Pressing some money into the palm of her hand, he bade her farewell; she kissed his, and feeling his arm, exclaimed, 'Oh, what a strong young white man!' Ralph laughed; and as he slowly descended the hill, he heard the poor old creature murmuring forth her notes of tribulation, which, reverberating like the sounds from an Æolian harp, melted in the distance till they completely died away.

On arriving at the hotel he found all things in confusion. The Monarch had received orders to get up steam immediately to carry despatches. That night Ralph quitted Fernland, in company with his two friends, for

> This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
> This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
> This other Eden, demi-paradise;
> This fortress, built by Nature for herself
> Against infection and the hand of war;

This happy breed of men, this little world,
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this—
Ould Countree!'

CHAPTER XIX.

'And what is friendship but a name,
A charm that lulls to sleep,
A shade that follows wealth or fame,
And leaves the wretch to weep?'—GOLDSMITH.

THE world does not believe in such a thing as attachment between man and man. Not I—but you, sir, and such as you—I've long since left it. And yet in the days I speak of Lord Alfred Playfair loved Ralph Osborne, and Ralph Osborne loved Lord Alfred. Theirs was a strong attachment. I think I hear you say, sir, 'What bosh!' Say on! I'll not dispute. Once heard I'm silent, till called upon to verify—then, indeed, the Spectre is *all there!* And you could not, in the days I'm speaking of, say a finer thing of any man than that!

It was Autumn. Ralph got a letter immediately upon his arrival in the Old Countree from Lord Alfred, urging him to go down to Trememdon. His great friend was absent on a cruise somewhere. Ralph found the society at the Castle highly enjoyable, but his mind seemed absent during his stay. Sometimes he would escort the Ladies Eleanor Frances and Gertrude Eva in their walks in the picturesque neighbourhood, but he was generally alone. He spent most of his time in gazing upon a certain portrait hanging in the library. The three-days-old was away on a visit; and the portrait too was taken when she was quite a child; yet the boy always fell to musing when he came near it. Its walls were full of paintings, but what was the whole race of Trememdon to him, smiled they never so genially, looked they never so warmly!

'His lips, his own—hers, and, oh! what eyes!' I heard him mutter once; and thus he dreamed the hours away. 'Had she grown up like him?' and yet he lacked the courage to ask. He wondered if she would come home. She didn't, and yet he didn't like to ask 'when?' It seemed too sacred—too much all his own to ask about. So he sighed instead, and the Marchioness heard him, and felt for him, for she knew what that sigh meant as she

watched him gazing there. He was too much rapt to notice her.

Ralph Osborne had never kissed. 'Not kissed !' you exclaim, sir; 'not kissed his little sister ?' 'Kissing one's sister is not kissing,' Ralph used to say, but no one heard him. I call to mind many sayings of this warm-hearted youth—sayings which were heard and re-echoed only by Fernland's sombre, silent mountains. Many a time have troops of horses started from where they were quietly grazing at the sound of his wild passionate tones. They could not understand him, but what he used to say made my lank old bones rattle again, and my few remnants of hair stand on end for hours.

Deep down in a wild ravine, with the scrub high over his head, and no sound save the screech of the mountain birds to disturb, I once heard him apostrophising—a kiss ! What made him think of such a thing in such a spot is more than I can say. His great friend and he were accidentally divided by a mountain range, and quite out of each other's hearing, or he would not have gone on so.

'A kiss !' exclaimed he, in melting accents, 'must be met, and fondly too, or else--' He paused, looked up, and blushed crimson ; an owl, scared by his sudden manner, darted up, whirled twice around his head, and made for some spot of even greater seclusion amongst the far-distant wilds.

'What ! sought ?' I breathed into the boy's ear.

He heeded not; but scanning the heavens, he raised his hands on high, as though invoking an inspiration. Presently he went on in fervent tones,

'Yes, sought as I would seek another's.

'Sought? ah, sought with hasteful eagerness, with bated breath, and arms entwined confusedly, unmindful of appearance—with soul absorbed in one fond, strong desire ; to meet in hurried, warm, yet off-repeated clasp that radiance of soul, intensest love, which, darting quick from each to each, kindles and rekindles a Sacred Fire ! Neglectedly long, wavy ringlets flow though ne'er intrude. And now the strong embrace grows wilder and more fervid !

'Deep passion thrills, enchants, enslaves ! the gentle fragrance of devotion seals the still closed lips, as each, throbbing in turn, holds simultaneous sacred converse !

'And yet 'tis only eager longing ! With sense of wild and unalloyed delight the tender pressure seems to slumber, the melting eyelids close, while feverous sighs quick ebb and flow ! Pulse beats with pulse in closest harmony. Breath steals away—then mingling, draws with breath perceptibly ! A sense of satisfaction

steals around the soul, whilst eyes yield gaze for gaze with pensive tenderness !

'Ah, thus to live, and thus to die, 'twere Rapture !

'Some fond expression's used, and lo ! the spell's dissolved!

'I'd sooner dwell upon a kiss I once enjoyed than hazard meeting lips which have no kisses in them——!

'Fair lips without a kiss !

'I'd sooner far embrace *you*, cold, dank toad—which do no violence to your nature, but e'en fulfil it !

'I do not give away my kisses; they're rather prone to hide !'

But, oh, what have I done ! I hear the distant boom of thunder reverberate through Space. What !—shall ?—I must desist, and see !

'*Too intense !*' he flashes forth.

And so I thought. 'Tis writ, however—it cannot be undone —he shouldn't, then, have said it ! !

And thus it was Ralph Osborne never yet had—kissed !

Chapter XX.

'I hate you, ye cold compositions of art !
Though prudes may condemn me and bigots reprove,
I court the effusions that spring from the heart,
Which throbs with delight to the first kiss of love.'—Byron.

Ralph reached Undone in a kind of stupor. First he wished he had seen her, then he was glad he had not. Immediately after, while walking from the West-end to its centre, he vowed he would go through fire and water but he would see her.

He called upon Walter, who expressed great pleasure at again meeting his half-brother; but he was immersed in 'business,' and had but little time to spare.

The Marquis and Marchioness had been kind and courteous to their son's entertainer; the young ladies and he were delighted with each other; but apart from being very polite and affable when in their society, he did not take special notice of them, notwithstanding that, in consequence of the absence of the young Viscount, he was thrown much into their society. They all regretted his great friend being away, but not a word was ever breathed about the little three-days-old. Promising, at the request of the young ladies, to forward his likeness on his arrival in town, he bade them farewell; and finding Walter so engrossed in 'affairs,' he did not mention his visit to Bluffshire;

but left no chance untried of falling in with Lord Alfred. Pacing the streets of Undone city one day, Ralph's attention was accidentally drawn to a prospectus issued by 'a highly respectable firm' of Vortex brokers, with bankers second to none in Undone city, and solicitors to match.

'A little, honest, thriving State' wanted—a little, temporary loan. It was prepared to pay a high rate of interest for it. The money was required to help construct a railway. The Security, the Credit, the Prospects of the little State—the Everything were all first-rate. Ralph required no high rate of interest. He was able to put by at each year's end enough to keep half-a-dozen Ralphs in comfort, ease, and fashion; but some evil genius prompted him to seek an introduction to this 'highly respectable firm,' which Walter procured, and in an incredibly short time Ralph might have been seen tête-à-tête with Haw-haw Horksigh, who, expatiating in glowing terms upon the great advantages attending Verdant's parting with several thousands of pounds sterling to aid the little State, which 'had always faithfully met its engagements,' soon succeeded in convincing him of the desirability of the 'investment.' It was easy in those days to obtain worthless bits of paper, called Bonds, in exchange for hard cash! This was called the 'Bits-of-Paper Swindle.'

Knowing as much about the Vortex as most others, which was precious little, he soon got drawn in—oh, beautifully!

Instead of doubling his income on the Capital Sunk—this little flourishing, *honest* (?) State defied him, then laughed at him, and did not meet even the first of its engagements!—nor the second!—nor the third! It ended in his getting back, at the expiration of three years, half the Capital he had thus been inveigled into signing away. He found that 'brokers' on the Undone Vortex were powerless to help their dupes out of a mess they were only too glad to get them into; that 'highly respectable' and Humbug, as applied to Bankers', Brokers', and Solicitors' 'transactions,' in connection with the Undone Vortex, were synonymous terms; and that the Committee of the Undone Vortex, sealed, signed, cemented, and delivered these 'transactions' to the inhabitants in such a manner as to stamp them with their approval, thus luring them to ruin!

So after this little misadventure Ralph trusted to no more prospectuses of Countrees, far or near, little or big, which were 'floated' or set sailing in the Vortex.

'Bear your loss like a man,' said Walter to him. 'Run down with me to Triton from Saturday till Tuesday, and forget it.'

'Let's get into "diggins" then,' said Ralph. 'I hate your Old Countree hotels.'

'Agreed, old boy.'

'Now, Mrs. Scrubberaway, what's the damage?' asked Ralph of the first decent landlady he saw.

'—— shillings a week; or —— shillings by the day, sir, and *con*cludes all.'

'Does what, Mrs. S.?' asked he.

'That *con*cludes all, sir,' she said solemnly.

It did—he took 'em.

They paced the Triton pier.

'There's that wretch Horksigh. I'll cut him,' exclaimed Ralph.

'Do no such thing, I tell yer, Ralph,' said Walter.

Horksigh did not give him the chance. Knowing he would never have the opportunity of swindling him again, he simply looked over him when they met, and sat himself beneath the band, dressed in a flowing suit of yellow-brown, gloves of palest lavender, doing the heavy with a dandy switch and cigar, and chatting with a lady and two daughters, whom I afterwards overheard Haw-haw pronounce 'deuced handsome girls too.'

A second swell, minus breed, but 'cashy-looking,' joined the party. *Sotto voce* mamma asked one of her girls, 'Where does Horksigh get such people from?'

And pretty Eva replied, 'Oh, it's Catchem—something in the City, mamma—so rich!'

Mamma tried to look resigned. Haw-haw now introduced the subject of matrimony. All were at once eager. Turning to one of the ladies, he exclaimed, with harsh, grating voice, looking all three women over with the same glance, 'You're all in the market, you know!'

Although it is so many hundreds of thousands of years ago, I recollect quite well soliloquising thus at the time: 'Horksigh, the jolly girls of the merrie Old Countree are not in *your market!* I have got the merrie girls aforesaid in *my* eye, and they are not for Horksigh!'

By the side of the covered seats a third swell—not paste—meandered up and down. In the loudest of grating voices, Haw-haw, advancing half-way across the pier-deck, extending, palm down, the little-finger side of his left gloved hand—the right being ungloved at the time—saluted the incipient pigeon. This favour being duly appreciated, the flow of conversation, momentarily disturbed, continued—the Haw-haw voice predominating.

'That's the man!' thought Ralph aloud; 'his name does not appear in the style of the firm.'

'Much better not,' joined in Walter; 'seems more old and "respectable."'

'Nothing can make them "respectable,"' said Ralph.

'They are—highly so,' said the other.

'Then Heaven save me from being "respectable!"' cried Ralph, thinking of his long over-due 'coupons'; of the excuses Horksigh made for their non-payment; such as that it was all owing to the siege of the capital of the Neighbouring and Polite Countree by the Powerful and Greedy Countree—the little repudiating Countree being hundreds of miles from both; of the time, too, when Horksigh met his dupes at the offices of a certain Council who assisted in such matters, and made an off-hand statement upon which opinions were then formed as to how much Haw-haw knew and withheld, and did not know, yet tried to make it appear he did; and of the direct interference of the then Arbiter of the destinies of all Countrees far and wide—a Prince of the Powerful and Greedy Countree—without which he and all similar dupes would never have been able to sell their *Bonds*, which, in the language of all Countrees far, near, punctual, repudiating, big, and little, meant *Obligations to Pay* a certain sum of *Interest* annually, at just about half their cost, years afterwards.

Chapter XXI.

'He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city.'

Ralph went on buying and selling just as usual, when one day he came running up to his old friend Fullheart in a state of great indignation. 'Hullo! Fullheart,' said he, 'this fellow has been cheating me—the robber! Look here, I bought these things last week and sold them yesterday, and I have consulted the Vortex "*Official List*" for both days and find no such prices "recorded"!'

'Calm yourself, my dear fellow,' said Fullheart quietly to him. 'What, Ralph! do you mean to say you really expected to find them there?'

'Expected! of course; why, the fellow has charged me higher and allowed me less than the extreme prices in both cases. I shall take it before the Committee for "inquiry" and "adjudication,"' said he, in a very decided tone.

'Oh! well, take my advice for once, and—don't,' quietly replied Fullheart.

'But why not?' asked Ralph eagerly.

'Oh, my boy, you're new at this sort of fun; but have you never heard talk of *Markham's* great case?'

'No; who the devil was he?'

'A fellow that got swindled right and left by a Vortex gang, and took his case, for he was very green, before the Committee for "adjudication," but got no more redress than you would.'

'But did he quote the "*Official List*"?'

'What, Markham? he quoted dozens. Unless you are prepared to prove—swearing goes for nothing in the Vortex Committee-room—that the "things" were bought and sold within the hours of eleven and three—and, of course, you can't—save yourself the trouble of taking it before the Committee.'

'That's infernal! What are the lists for, then?'

'Some say to delude the public with ——'

'Oh, come, I say, draw it mild! Do you mean to say that a great public institution like ——'

'The Vortex is not a public institution. Once inside the Committee-room they close the doors around you. The chairman, with an admixture of hauteur and bland politeness, which savours of irresponsible power, informs you that you are probably not aware of the fact I have just named; or else your broker has *made erasures in his books*, like Markham's chap did, and thus makes the "transaction" chime in with any hour in which he chooses to say it was done, either very early or late; and, of course, the case is dismissed.'

'Oh, heavens!' cried the boy excitedly; 'but what did they do to the chap who made the erasures?'

'It was not so much that. Markham brought several charges against the fellows, and in the face of all odds more than substantiated every one, but got no redress. I might tell you all some day, not now.'

'But what is a fellow to do, then?'

'Grin and bear it,' said his old friend, laughing loudly.

'I won't!' replied the boy, leaving Fullheart's office in a state of inconceivable excitement.

Meeting him a few days afterwards, he asked Ralph if he had acted upon his advice.

'Oh,' said he, 'I've got a friend, a Vortex Committee-man—he'll put me all right. I shall do just as he advises.'

'A friend a Committee-man, have you? Look here,' said Fullheart to the verdant Ralph, 'the Committee-man is a member of the Vortex. Your broker is also a member. Put this and that together, and ask yourself whether you'll get any good by following his advice.'

The advice the Committee-man gave Ralph was harmless enough; he exceeded it. The broker had his answer ready—what broker on the Vortex had not? For the moment Ralph was silenced; but he was hot, nay impetuous. It would not have taken much to have made him kick his broker out of his own office, neck and crop; he refrained, however, but not liking what he called his broker's infernal cheek, he, thinking to hold the terror of his own Committee over him, followed up by

'I presume you know the chairman, Mr. Didleap?'

'Not I! and don't want to—why?' asked he, looking at Ralph in a manner very exasperating to the temper. The scene which followed Ralph's threatening to take the case before the Committee defies the Spectre's poor powers of description. The laughter was too loud not to be genuine—so seldom, too, did Vortex brokers exceed a grin or chuckle. Ralph felt sure it was taken up and re-echoed in the outer office.

'Take it before the Committee!' said this broker on the Undone Vortex. His laughter was a treat to witness.

Little knowing at the time that brokers on the Undone Vortex were the only irresponsible people in the whole of the Old Countree, Ralph left the private office in a state of high dudgeon. He darted along—it was so! the door had been left purposely open for any little amount of 'unpleasantness' to be diffused amongst the clerks, and there they were, lads and youths, grinning away, some in their sleeves, others behind ledgers or desks, all vainly endeavouring to sober themselves after their share in the merriment. They looked comical enough, and seemed to think he ought to enjoy the joke too, and laugh at his own threat to 'take his case before the Committee for adjudication!'

Part the Second.

Chapter I.

'Her feet, beneath her petticoat,
Like little mice stole in and out,
As if they feared the light;
But, oh, she dances such a way,
No sun upon an Easter-day
Is half so fine a sight.'—Sir John Suckling.

Never had Old Trememdon Castle been fuller of welcome guests than during one Christmas time, when, all the family having unexpectedly assembled together, the mirth and jollity which prevailed knew scarcely any bounds. Several years had elapsed since Ralph was at Old Trememdon. The girls had grown up. Lady Eleanor, who had turned twenty, was majestic and stately. She and the young Viscount, who had obtained leave of absence for a week from his regiment—he was in the Guards—were similar in tastes and dispositions. The Viscount had not long returned from college; Lord Alfred had never learnt a lesson outside his father's home. People said Reginald always did the correct thing, and Alfred the natural thing. Until the latter took to yachting he and the three-days-old used to be bosom companions. She seemed to be growing more beautiful every day. Look at her as she trips along the snow-clad, broad gravel path leading to the lodge gates! She and Lady Gertrude, a dear, good girl, are bound for Trememdon village. They are going to see that 'everybody has everything,' as Lady Beatrice Violet Playfair puts it. And everybody always did have everything at Old Trememdon at Christmas, and every other time too; it was their own faults if they did not.

'Here comes my precious little flower,' poor old Betty Nairn was heard to murmur as the two young ladies stepped merrily down the well-paved streets. Oh, what delicious sounds those tiny heels did make as they tapped the hard, smooth flags! what thrilling music they conveyed! The two young girls walked briskly on, keeping step with military precision; tap, tap—tap, tap—down they went! They turned a corner in the winding village, and then prepared to descend the hill to the beach. The snow was not swept here; but what was that to Trememdon girls?

'Let's run,' cries Beatrice merrily.

'Come on,' shouts Gertrude; 'there's no one looking if we do fall.'

And fall they did. Yes, both, arm in arm, and rolled in the soft white snow together. Oh, what a display of lovely—symmetry! Lady Beatrice had challenged her sister to the rash attempt, therefore the pretty little scenes which followed are sacred.

Ah, to have had one little peep under those jaunty little hats the Trememdon girls were wearing! it would have repaid even you, sir, to have gone down as far as Bluffshire to have witnessed the sight that Christmas morning.

'Here comes my pretty little rose again,' said old Betty, as the two young ladies again stepped merrily and in the highest of bright spirits along those welcome flags in front of Betty's house.

'Good morning, Betty;' 'Good morning, dear old Betty,' said they, the more endearing salutation proceeding from the younger. Old Betty wishing them good morning in return in trembling voice, Beatrice softly and kindly inquired after her health, and whether she had 'all she wanted;' and old Betty said, 'Lor' bless you, miss! more, much more.'

A fine, handsome woman must Betty have been in her youth, for traces of more than rustic beauty still remained. A pleasant admixture of freedom and respect was observable in her manner when addressing Lady Beatrice, which betokened the existence of ties beyond those usually existing between the humble cottager and those above them in rank and position. From her infancy Lady Beatrice had been her especial charge, and only upon her son joining the coast-guard service had old Betty consented to yield her up to others and leave the Castle in order to watch over her boy's welfare.

'Only fancy, Sissy,' said Lady Beatrice to her sister, as they returned from their errand of love, 'Betty is turned seventy-four! she must require a little looking after.'

'Everybody now has got all they want,' returned Lady Gertrude, kissing Beatrice's little plump cheeks the while.

'I am so glad,' was Beatrice's reply.

The old Marquis was in the jolliest of jolly humours. These did not often vary, but at this Christmas time his spirits seemed to have been bottled up for years, ready to be poured forth in a ceaseless flow of open-heartedness, merriment, and good will.

'That vagabond young chap, Alfred, is back again,' said he, 'and has not been taken for a privateer or cruiser; for my own

pet boy, and his sisters' darling, as they call him, so sure as Christmas came round was as certain to be thousands of miles away in some unheard-of fortified harbour, or dodging about in search of wonderful sunsets or scenic effects, the Lord knows where! Why, his adventures in Fernland along with that what's his name he's for ever raving about ——'

'Ralph Osborne, papa,' whispered Lady Beatrice, with a half curious, half bashful expression depicted on her features.

'Ralph Osborne it is, my darling baby,' said the Marquis, turning towards her.

'Papa, I'm getting too old to be called baby now,' said the young lady gleefully, accompanying the correction with a kiss which would have reached to just about the jolly old Marquis's third button had he not stooped and pressed his youngest and favourite daughter fondly to his bosom, and kissed her warm, coral lips.

'Where is Ralph, Walter?' asked Lord Alfred Playfair, during a game of billiards that evening.

Lady Beatrice played a saucy, rattling stroke; not a waiting game. She was winning now, but in a moment her hand trembles—she is put off her stroke.

'Birdie darling, go on, there's a dear,' said Lady Eleanor kindly to her.

She went on, pocketing her ball, and from that moment tired of the game. Timidly gliding towards Walter, she appeared as though about to ask him something; looked first round the room, and then at him, and finally retired without saying a word.

Walter informed them that Ralph had turned up once or twice at 'his place;' he believed he was abroad, but did not know where. Cues were put down for the moment—there was an evident *movement* among the little group—when they were resumed Lady Beatrice played, and lost. It was a coincidence that she was often to be seen regarding a certain likeness with more interest than all the others put together, and that this likeness, by some unaccountable fatality, hung in her own boudoir. Perhaps her brother had often and often talked to his little pet sister about Ralph Osborne; perhaps she had listened.

Walter Maxwell, to whom the Marquis had taken a great fancy, had been introduced to Trememdon Castle by Lord Alfred, who was so pleased with him that he had got him to accompany him in the Sybil, on her return from Fernland. Walter could tell him, he said, more about his own mines in one half-hour than all his Captains, Secretaries, and Reports in a month; and he often got an invitation to the Castle.

'And bring your friends, too, Mr. Maxwell,' said the Marquis.

Walter Maxwell had never brought his friends. He had put the Marquis up to so many 'good things:' never but once had he asked him to put his name to a swindle, and the look Walter got when the old Marquis scented it afar made Walter Maxwell's blood run cold; he withdrew it at once—'All a mistake,' he said; 'twas something he was going to—*expose!*

Walter was taught a lesson. The old Marquis, honesty himself, believed Walter, and the matter passed. And then Walter possessed so much 'information' that he was growing fast in his favour, and becoming invaluable. The Marquis was getting immensely rich, too, so everybody believed.

And this Christmas passed off in the merriest manner at Old Trememdon. Ralph Osborne had sought far and near for Lord Alfred, and at length, seeing his name in the papers, had dashed off to Beauville, in time to find him gone. Ralph had just been done out of his thousands in that 'little State swindle.' He, poor boy, was thirsting for — revenge! against whom? that hawk-eyed broker, who in glowing language had inveigled him into the venture? that Undone Vortex Committee who had sanctioned the swindle? the first-class bankers and stainless lawyers, all so 'highly respectable,' who had lent their names to it? or the wretched little Countree which he had reason to suspect was possibly as much sinned against as sinning? Ralph couldn't tell. First, he thought it was the broker. What man of honour, asked he, would issue a prospectus which ruined thousands? 'I could not do it,' cried Ralph, with the utmost indignation; 'or if I did, I would, on bended knees, extort their pardon. I would wear sackcloth all my days, turn hermit, or, better, road-sweeper, and so catch frantic, bolting horses, with lovely girls thereon, and save a life perhaps! I'd risk my own if I could thus, retrieving my fate, begin afresh. Ah, thus to expiate my ignominy! And then, the Undone Vortex Committee?'

'They are all either Brokers or Jobbers; that's enough,' said his friend Fullheart to him.

Chapter II.

'The earth was fev'rous and did shake :
Remembrance cannot parallel a fellow to it.'
SHAKESPEARE.

'Every one must have a Vortex broker' was an axiom in the days I'm speaking of. Ralph had his, and his broker was a robber. Ralph didn't know it; how should he? But seasons came and went, and with them the inevitable 'panic,' as of yore, of longer or shorter duration, which his former broker, the 'respectable firm,' and a number of congenial members combined, undertook skilfully to 'engineer.' And now the foul current which flowed beneath the surface was revealed. These members of the Undone Vortex, having bound themselves together, concocted and spread about the most infamous lies, the real purport of which was soon apparent. Wanton and unheard-of stories were fabricated in other quarters. The number of unscrupulous agents augmented. Folly succeeded wickedness, and madness folly; the 'method in their madness' was well planned, and ably-acted frenzy followed in its train.

'General monetary collapse!' was the universal cry. 'Total failure in the Vortex!' 'No settlement for the "account"!' 'Gold-ring!' 'Bullion demand!' 'Suspension of the Old Countree Bank Act!' &c., &c. Forged telegrams flew hither and thither. Ralph got one professing to come from a friend of his—a very knowing fellow. He did not know it came from his broker—how could he? it was so, however. Here it is: 'Affairs are approaching a terrible climax! Crisis imminent! Must be much worse before better! Get out of all your holdings! No time to lose!' 'Well, by Jove!' said Verdant; 'here's a decent fellow. No time to lose! where's my broker?'

'Proof poz.,' said his broker, who quietly stood at his elbow. This broker was a 'bear,' that is, he had sold at the highest a lot of 'things' which he never in his lifetime possessed, and judging the worst of the storm which he and numbers of other kindred spirits had fomented was over—in other words, that the net of victims was full to bursting—he, anxious to make sure of his share of the plunder, desired to 'close his account,' now 'open for the fall,' and by buying back again these never-acquired stocks, shares, &c., pocket his profits, and make of Ralph Osborne his victim! Ralph had never been a 'bear' or a 'bull' either. Had he been asked to bet on a horse he would have shrunk from the idea; but gambling on the Undone Vortex

looked so much like 'business;' it was surrounded with associations of 'respectability.' There was a great 'House' where all the chicanery was carried on, which looked imposing, commercial, and respectable. There were numerous offices in Undone city, whose inhabitants, with their clerks, parasites, and hangers-on, did nothing else but set pit-falls for the unwary, and owing to the halo of mystery which attached to these 'transactions,' everybody liking to be thought knowing about such matters, the Undone Vortex drew in more victims than any other Betting Ring in the Old Countree; and once in, get out you could not, whether you were robbing others or being robbed.

> 'Doubtless the pleasure is as great
> Of being cheated as to cheat.'—HUDIBRAS.

Little wonder then that Ralph Osborne fell an easy prey to the Spoilers. He could 'deal' with any one over a flock of twenty to thirty thousand sheep, or any quantity of cattle, horses, or land, where everything was above board, but as yet he had never been thrown into the Vortex, and had he met with Lord Alfred at Beauville, or gone down again to Old Trememdon, he in all probability never would.

'Bah! no limits to-day,' roars this broker, for Ralph must sell, and had already asked the prices. Ralph was in his broker's toils.

'Sell!' urged this broker.

'I have none to sell; you have——'

'That's nothing to do with it,' interposed this broker quickly. 'Sell as though you had—buy back when they've got quite low; and when you do not want to have—to-morrow, next week, week after—'tis done. Pocket the difference; your fortune's made. Leave all to me!—and all over a "panic"!—a certain thing!—leave all!—a fortune! hia! hia! ha! ha! hia! ha!'

And in the heat and in the hurry the robber dashed off, leaving Ralph half-dazed, knowing neither what he had said or done. What had he done? what he had never done before; placed his destiny in the hands of a broker on the Undone Vortex!

A moment's reflection—Ralph darted after him—it was too late! The robber had entered *Alsatia*, hotly pursued by Ralph. Stout porters kept its doors.

'No farther, sir, please—can't go there, sir!'

'But he's—he's—I must see him!' shouted Ralph.

'Can't go in, sir; can't go in!' and they held him back.

'He's got my mon—he's going to—oh, let me stop him!' implored the youth.

A hubbub ensued. Ralph was taken away half-desperate, nor until Brokum came from the Vortex could he find out what had been done, or how he had done it. Presently he came running and out of breath.

'Only just in time, as luck would have it,' he whispered in Ralph's ear on his return. 'Devilish lucky fellow, Osborne; wish I was in your shoes—things are going worse every moment.'

Ralph, half beside himself, asked 'Really?'

The Vampyre's Victim now, unknown to himself, occupied Brokum's place, who got the jobber's turn, his own commission, and a large profit besides. Doubling his former venture, Brokum now turned 'bull,' unknown to Ralph again, of course.

And now the mania held him in its embrace. Hoping for real disasters, he went about the city proclaiming his faith in coming ills.

'How are the markets?' he wildly asked from every one he met. To his excited fancy each must be a 'bear;' besides, his broker told him so.

Presently he heard, 'They're lower still;' his broker confirming this statement with an icy stare; while as for Ralph he wildly clapped his hands and said,—'What glorious sport! and what a simple way of making money!'

His manner, before so grave, became quite childish; the people stared, he laughed, and then they laughed again, both 'bears' and 'bulls' all mixed together in the crowd.

At four o'clock the broker came from out the Vortex.

'A trifle firmer—only a trifle!' and then a knowing grin, which going to his victim's heart, he scarcely hears him say, 'but little doing.' Getting his 'contracts' for this one day's sport signed fresh and in a bold, steady hand by the Undone city Vampyre, who consoled him cheerfully at parting thus: 'Take my word, they'll be much worse!'

Ralph leaves the exciting scene, devoutly praying for 'things' to go much worse.

Chapter III.

'No creature smarts so little as a fool.'—Pope.

Ralph dined at his club, seized an evening paper, and listened. A low, mumbling sound attracts his ear. 'After regular hours more rational feeling—much business done—rise of two per cent all round—heavy "bear" account.'

'Pardon me, a rise, sir! two per cent all round did I hear you say?'

A stranger hands him the paper and watches his paling cheek.

'Ah! now for a sleepless night,' sighs he; 'and mine are highest. Oh, cursed fool to meddle thus with things I wot not of! but then my broker said—oh!—oh!'

'Who may your broker be, Mr. Osborne?' asks a voice not unfamiliar to him.

'Hullo! Sir Manfred, you here!'

'By right, Mr. Osborne—my club; and who's your broker, pray?'

'John Brokum of——'

'Good God, sir! John Brokum of Dirt Alley! That's the man that sends false telegrams about—so they say—to mislead people.'

'Oh, Sir Manfred! no gentleman would do that. I won't believe—' exclaimed Ralph, in a state of perplexity. He was interrupted by the other, who remarked loudly,—'Sir Manfred is seldom wrong, Mr. Osborne; take my advice, have nothing whatever to with him.'

They shake hands and retire for the night.

Taking a rapid glance at *The Age* in the morning over a hurried cup of coffee, the bad news (!) being confirmed, with sundry remarks on people's wrongheadedness and folly, all of which Ralph passes over, he comes to strictures on 'outside fools,' who helped perpetuate the 'panic,' at which he takes offence. 'Others made money, why shouldn't I? My broker advised me, too, or else I shouldn't have thought of doing it; so a "bear" I'll be in spite of *The Age* and every other journal!'

Down at the office 'things' are reported 'good,' and better every minute. What's to be done, thinks Ralph?

'I want more "cover," Mr. Osborne; your margin's nigh run out.'

'Good heavens, Mr. Brokum! already?'

'More "cover," please, soon as convenient.' Into the Vortex he dashed; 'twas promised, and 'twas given.

The day wore on, and up the markets went. Excited by the reckless air of those about him, Ralph soon began to taste a sense of Speculation's thrall. Urged on by fate their victims ne'er give in; flog, flog the jaded brutes, or they must drop! They never did while pounds or credit lasted.

'Never say die!' cries one. 'Pluck has it!' says another. Seized with the infection, 'Neck or nothing!' Ralph shouts.

Temptation was too strong; amid the plaudits of the approvers of his rash resolve he led his broker arm-in-arm to the Vortex threshold. 'Buy back?' asked Brokum.

'And make a loss! trust me!' cried Verdant, in a huff. 'Sell more!—sell more! I'm not a fool to "flounder," as they call it yonder—sell more!' Again Ralph stood before *Alsatia.* Its doors were never closed, yet never open, but swinging to and fro, while liveried porters kept it sacred. You could not enter there! Still, men could be seen, arranged in groups, talking apart, or hurrying to and fro. Some were ejaculating with excited air, while two gesticulated fully a minute. It was long to 'do' a 'bargain' in. Perhaps these were 'doing' an 'outsider!' They popped something down in a long, narrow book, their 'bargain,' to be checked early in the morning amid a most tumultuous roaring, to which nothing could compare; each calling loud the others' names, amid a frightful din, like bellowing bulls, and neighing steeds, and shouting jockeys, and street mobs all combined.

The clamour now was fearful. Commissionaires with telegrams rushed here and there, while those torn-up with envelopes bestrewed the floor. Clerks shouted to principals, brokers to these, while some dashed wildly about with hats half off behind, as though they had just heard the last trump, and were coming in to tell a friend.

It was three o'clock, and some were smoking. Fragrance of strong Havana soothed excited nerves. Stentorian tones of gruff-voiced porters rose higher than all the sounds of Babel put together. 'William Wheel, William Wheel of Wheeler and Wheel,' were now the sounds echoing and reëchoing under a roof which, vaulting in heterogeneities in every sense save one, seemed modelled on a plan to give full resonance without confusion. The stream of passers was incessant; no one knew where to shelter from the rush.

'Don't stand there, gentlemen, please; don't stand there!'

'Call Brokum,' said Ralph, to try the effect.

'John Brokum—John Brokum—John Brokum,' as before. The stream of life was undiminished.

Ralph mused. 'This roof is made for sound. Surely one equal in acoustic properties might have been devised for Albert's Hall. Must the Undone Vortex—for use, not elegance, designed—surpass for excellence of sound the Old Countree's Great Memorial?'

And still his broker dallied. 'He surely is among that throng,' thought Ralph; 'how I long to be there, too! Ex-

citement has its charm. The first to get the news of great events financial, events political, commercial too ! How promptly and how well I'd act ! Well, it is a glorious life ! What bargains I would drive !'

The Spectre thus soliloquised: 'A bargain drive ! Ralph Os borne, be not deceived ; the men inside that Vortex would drive a closer. You'd never find it out till a month after !'

'How knowing, too, I'd be !' thought he.

'Ah ! many there would prove so knowing, Ralph, that when you thought you'd got the tip direct—and perhaps you had—they'd put their heads together, their "books" compare, and say, "Come, come, enough of this ; we've got 'em now !" They'd then wheel round and leave you, tip and all, quite high and dry, a spectacle, with calculations all so true, had you but been in time—consigned to hopeless shade !' And, sir, the Spectre laughs —forgive !

Out the Vortex Vampyre comes at last, with 'business' done. And how felt poor Ralph Osborne ? The Vampyre has his 'cover' safe, all locked and barred ! and Ralph is in his books. Poor Ralph ! the Spectre thought he looked so woe-begone.

Chapter IV.

'Ah, happy years ! once more who would not be a boy ?'—Byron.

Sir Manfred Locock was an 'estimable' man. He had been knighted for having rendered the State many important services. Being of a shrewd and calculating turn of mind, he had had the unspeakable good luck to make a wonderful discovery. Forseeing that in a very few thousands of years the world's supply of coal would be exhausted, he had turned his attention to the invention of some method of supplying their place and generating heat by a chemical process. In this search he was eminently successful. He also tried his best to show to the benighted inhabitants of the earth how fuel might be profitably economised, and steam too ; but this was reserved, at a later date, for the Spectre to point out. At one time locomotives used to startle the peaceful inhabitants by making noises which were truly infernal, as they rushed across the surface of the earth. *Mais tout cela était changé.* Much labour and fuel too were eventually saved to the world by the application of what was termed Moon-power, viz. that exerted by the force of tides along sea-shores in certain localities, the rise and fall of rivers, &c., &c.

When Sir Manfred exchanged the earth for another Sphere, he was canonised by the inhabitants of Undone city for his many useful inventions, but of this he was not aware until the Spectre informed him. And in Specteria he goes by the name of Saint Manfred to this year A.D. one million.

Sir Manfred's father—for Sir Manfred indulged in the great luxury of having had, and of still possessing, a father before him—was a poet: he did not live by writing—he was sole patentee and inventor of the newest method of constructing roofless houses, guarranted to keep out all weathers; and selling the premises where such aeriform constructions were fabricated to the Mid-Air Railway Company at a price which, in those days, was considered fabulous, he retired to enjoy his *otium cum dignitate* with that conspicuous degree of suavity and good humour which good circumstances and good constitution generally produce.

Sir Manfred was peculiar. He thought he was a chiropodist, and told everybody so. He was, however, no such thing. He constantly referred to his profession, with feelings, if not of genuine pride, yet of self-complacency—saying, 'And you know, Mr. Strange (he Mistered everybody after his knighthood), I took my O.K.A. at the Undone 'varsity, and my N.O.A. at the Queen's, and I intend shortly to bring out a patent for *galvanising feet*, by which they will be rendered more impervious to weather than clogs, pattens, or goloshes can possibly render them. You see, having made that branch of the profession my exclusive study, I feel a certain license.'

He then would enlarge upon his own case. At one time Sir Manfred was sound in wind, limb, and eyesight. An accident had, however, befallen him. Stairs were narrow in certain portions of the district which claimed the honour of his supervision, or rather of his acquaintance; and being narrow—it was after dinner—he fell!

Now before this untimely fall, Sir Manfred was strong in wind, limb, and eyesight—very; but after, even his best friends said they could perceive a visible decline in each!

It was sad, ay shocking, for Sir Manfred had a wife and family, each member of whom had to become sensible of, and by degrees to reconcile themselves to, this decline in Sir Manfred's wind, limbs, and eyesight, especially his knee, which ever after became uncertain in its movements, rendering him unstable in his tread, sometimes slipping to the right, then to the left, and last of all quite round or inside out, so Sir Manfred declared to his numerous friends and acquaintances. Sir Manfred wore

bandages for support, and went to several of what were called in those days 'Cloudcures,' where the poor, deluded patients, being wrapped for hours in vaporous swaddling clothes, emerged so red and steamy, you wouldn't have taken them for the same fools that had entered. They were though, and a trifle worse, for they vowed it had done them ever so much good, whether it it had or not; and the guinea-seeking Doctors who presided were always ready to encourage them in their delusions, saying, 'Oh, if you feel worse, you're sure to be mending! a crisis will soon come!'

It did; then the Madhouse received the beclouded fools.

Sir Manfred, with the inevitable apparition of his paternal parent before his eyes, now travelled North and South, East and West (he never soared!) in search of health for his knee! One day he would say to a kindly inquiring friend, 'You see, Mrs. Ankshus, I've got no appetite (the Sceptre never saw a bigger); I cannot sleep at night too (Sir M. retired by eleven and was never up before nine); it's on the brain!—I think too much!' Sir Manfred usually idling life's placid hours away sitting upon a seat chatting with a neighbour, and smoking his pipe either in that neighbour's garden or at some tranquil watering-place. 'I'm getting on better though; I tried a new kind of boot yesterday, by which the whole weight of the frame will, by means of a contrivance I intend to patent, be suspended in mid-air, and only necessitate any action *of the knee* (this was said with considerable emphasis) at the pleasure of the wearer, and as I get weaker, this has become necessary. I think,' he added languidly, 'I shall never have occasion to use my knee again! Oh, if my appetite were only better! But it's gone—completely!—it's all on the brain—on the brain—the brain—brain!!!'

Chapter V.

'So, naturalists observe, a flea
Has smaller fleas that on him prey;
And these have smaller still to bite 'em;
And so proceed *ad infinitum*.'—Swift.

Ralph Osborne was in a muddle, and profoundly at a loss. Day followed day, and still the markets rose. He pondered moodily, standing at the office-door. Whether what he had done would turn out right or not, was quite beyond all human ken. Opinions were various, and no one knew. Why, then,

should Ralph Osborne? 'More cover, sir, more cover!' was all his broker had to say. Again 'twas given, and again, and Ralph was growing glum—oh, very, sir—his money was flitting every hour—each moment as it flew! His last sales had not been made so readily, for Brokum was compelled to 'effect' them in the 'House,' and not just pass them through his books! Besides, John Brokum wanted Ralph to buy them back from him, and thus give John the full turn again! A 'bear' upon the Undone Vortex!—how strange it sounds in the year A.D. One million, when the Vortex is no more! In those it really sounded like a knell upon the ear.

And Ralph reflected, 'Is this Revenge?' and then was lost in thought.

A client walked straight in; a cashy man, no speculator, although he wore a 'choker' neat and white, which, in those days, proclaimed the parson—or the undertaker!

John Brokum bowed profoundly; in walked the parson high
Into John Brokum's parlour, while John oped wide his eye.
The parson hesitates: thinks John, 'I'll have a try,'
In as neat an office parlour, sir, as ever you did spy.
'Sell your bank shares!' says Brokum. Ralph listened quietly.
The parson gone, 'I'll have 'em,' said John Brokum suddenly.
'Here, Bouncer, quick! and tell the man (of course it's all my eye)
The bank will break, and fast the shares are dropping heavily!'
Bouncer was off; Ralph's all a heap; though not surprised was I.
Ralph bites his lips. 'The fiends!' roars he; 'what ruthless deviltry!'
Now Bouncer's back. 'What news?' cries John. The other shuts an eye.
'Sell all!' says he. 'All right,' cries John; 'it's always well to try.
You named the price; we get "the turn,"' said John, in voice so dry.
'Books' tell the deed. 'Business' proceeds, as erst, unconsciously.

* * * * * * *

And, sir, the Spectre laughs again! Should you detect a hollow sound this time, forgive!

When 'twas all done I saw Ralph Osborne rushing frantically out, like Bouncer, with hat half off behind, looking more like a Vampyre than ever I had yet seen him. Irresolute while the act was playing, when it was too late—when footsteps had approached, when he knew that 'the poor devil in the white choker,' as he afterwards called him, had been swindled, because he put confidence in his broker's word, and believed there was '*something bad about the bank*,' while he (Ralph Osborne) knew its Manager and two of its Directors intimately, and that, to gain his ends, this broker had been telling his client a deliberate falsehood—then he felt himself to be—almost a villain!

'Too late—too late!' he found himself saying, as struggling

out of a gutter into which his haste had precipitated him, scarcely knowing which direction he was taking, or why, he found himself on his legs again careering through the streets of Undone city, vainly endeavouring to gather his thoughts and resolve his own wretched fate.

'Hallo ! that's Maxwell's voice, I know—I'd swear to it in full chorus ;' and glad was Ralph to seize the hand of any man—not an Undone Vortex broker.

'You seem flurried, Ralph ; never run like that, my boy.'

As he met Walter's gaze, Ralph, innocence itself, confided in few words his brief experience.

'A "bear" now !' cried Walter, ''tis worse than madness !—turn round at once !'

Walter informed Ralph how he had managed matters.

'A bear before the fall—bought back at the lowest—trebled—and mean to hold a good bit yet.'

Walter was not long in inducing Ralph to close his old account, and to open a new one with new brokers, which were Walter's, of course.

'But, Walter, I must say something to those fellows for doing that parson clean out of his bank shares.'

'Do no such thing, Ralph ; what affair is it of yours ?'

'Oh, damn 'em, I will, though !' said Ralph, violently breaking away from his brother.

'Ta-ta, then ; if you go on like that in the city, I've done,' said his brother. Ralph paused. 'What thanks would you get if you told the man himself ? Besides, you're too late ; and as to telling them—bah, leave 'em alone !'

'Well, I suppose it must be so,' said Ralph, with a suppressed sigh ; 'confound the beasts !'

Ralph now opened an account 'for the rise' with Walter's brokers, he pocketing half Ralph's commissions, unknown to him. Ralph now sighed for no more failures, but prayed for a fall in the Bank-rate instead !

It comes ! Oh, happiness ! His stocks mount rapidly !

'Hurrah ! I'm on the right road now ! Oh, where is Walter ?' shouts Ralph excitedly ; and whenever he meets Maxwell, even in dense city throngs and crowded thoroughfares, surrounded by pale and anxious faces ('bears' Ralph insists on calling them), he slaps him on the back, calls him no end of a fellow, and everything that is glorious !

At Walter's office he meets Slasher, Somers, and Stanley, all of whom are 'bulls.'

And still the markets are buoyant ! Ralph now looks know-

ing, predicting another fall in the Bank-rate immediately. The 'tone' of the markets is strong and healthy, and Ralph fancies himself supremely happy.

'Revenge at last!' cries he. What a madman the people think him! He treads as if on air—his heart is swelling hourly! He strikes his bosom as if to satisfy himself of his own existence, and cries audibly, 'This—this is joy, 'tis real! oh joy, oh joy! Let the people stare, I care not! Perhaps they're "bears,"' says he; 'they can't be "bulls," or they would do the same—ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!'

And still the markets rise. He's making money every hour—each moment as it rolls. Oh, what delight to call it all his own, to count it up, to think it o'er again!

Just one brief hour of joy!

The markets yet bear up, no wavering signs appear, no trembling has begun! 'Twill come. Ralph knows it not. Aha! then *sauve qui peut*—and devil take the hindermost!

Like damsels dressed with care in holiday attire,
All sporting on the glade are ta'en with thunder-shower,
And rush with breathless haste all, all to one fair bower,
Finding no space within, still press around the door;
'No room; 'tis full; no room!'—the cry is 'Still they come!'
And dresses torn and spoiled to-morrow tell their doom:
So 'outside' fools, all bent on pelf to steal—or coin,
Bid higher still, then highest. Now comes the sudden turn!
'They're needled, sir! they've burst!' Insiders have the pull.
'They drop still lower yet!' On rushes fast each fool;
While some, urged to restrain, 'hold,' to become a tool;
More 'diff'rence' pay, and grin the sickly 'outside' grin
Of trusting fools despoiled at th' Old Countree's Betting-Ring!
Let them, poor fools! Why not? Their brokers grin the while;
And grins the Parasite, with an unearthly smile—
That flea of fleas, who gives advice all free and gratis,
Who feeds on other fleas, and grins enough to sate us.
The 'cover' gone, look out! Now frown succeeds each grin.
Pursue? Stop thief? Call the police, then?—ah, no such thing!
''Twould make a scand'lous hubbub. Our deeds are dark and weird;
Though in high places done, of Clamour we're afeard.
What's the wretch worth? A NAME? Ha! good! we'll hunt the town;
We'll haunt his home, ATTACH his goods, shame the poor devil down.
We led him on a dance, we know. More fool to be so led!
We'll grin our grin of deviltry; if not, we'll take his bed.
If comes the worst, his blood, his sighs, his wife, his brains, his home,
Are OURS, to do with as we will. We'll sink him in his tomb!'

Chapter VI.

'Still from the fount of Joy's delicious springs
Some bitter o'er the flowers its bubbling venom flings.'—Byron,

'Walter, old man, I want yer,' said Ralph, at a week's end, the rise still continuing, and his heart bursting with gratitude. 'We'll go up, a lot of us, in my drag—"Blaze and Riband," Beaumond—morrow—bring your fellows—dine—stroll in park—home, cool evening—say th' word. I'll telegraph dinner.'

Slapping Ralph on both his shoulders Walter exclaimed, 'Capital idea, by Jove!' and was off in a moment to look up his fellows. And a jolly time they had of it, but Ralph couldn't think, nor fix his ideas upon any object unconnected with his present—'Occupation,' mused he, 'why, what is it? I'm a *Gambler!* I must be!' (a cold shiver ran through him), 'with an uncertain stake. Is that right? Is anything right—or wrong? No? Confound it, there must be! Hang it all, I never felt so queer! I see a single vision floating away somewhere. I try to grasp: if I could, would it satisfy? Shouldn't I crave for more? I am absorbed by this—Passion I call it. I wonder how many do succeed. I'll inquire, but not of these fellows. How they'd laugh! Why, if I take up a common newspaper even, nothing interests, except, of course, the price of coals, if my stocks are "rails;" and peace and war signs, if foreign stocks. I never felt so queer before. I—'

'Hullo, Ralph! in the clouds?' shouted Walter; 'there's Topsy tripping, and Florry half asleep. Wake up, man, wake up!'

'Come, Topsy lass, Florry!' cried Ralph. Being appealed to, both mares were soon in good form, and the pace becoming good, Beaumond was at length reached. Walter had invited several 'clients' and an 'insider.' Ralph asked Slasher, Stanley, and Somers to be his guests. All the party were gamesters, and nearly all of Walter's choosing. Ralph knew no satellites—had no 'clients,' and the few Vortex men he did know had not favourably impressed his untutored mind.

Dinner over, they strolled in the park, smoked, and vociferated 'shop' profusely. Not a man of the party talked about anything useful or of general interest—noble was out of the question. It was all far beyond Ralph, and he began to wonder whether he should be ever able to rattle on as did those fellows.

'I feel beastly stupid, and can't get a word in,' said he to Walter, who was quiet too, having a little 'thing' in mines to

introduce to Ralph at a convenient opportunity. Ralph continued —he had just dined: 'With all nature smiling around, yet finding no sympathy in my bosom; the joyous, happy lark soaring above and carolling forth its most enchanting melody, bringing back boyhood's happy days to memory—' Walter would have called this 'drivelling,' had he not been too engrossed to hear it. He caught the last few words, however—'e'en ere the lurid glare of Speculation had prey'd upon my soul, blighting it with a contagion I find it impossible to obliterate, and now I feel deaf to every sound save one. I have no regret but—*that I had not turned "bull" before!*'

'Ha, ha! good, Ralph; sensible, Ralph; right you are, and no mistake—ha, ha! Did you hear that, Slasher? Somers, come and listen. Here, Wingram—Stanley, here—ha, ha, ha!'

Not knowing what he had said, Ralph wisely joined in the laugh at once. Travels were descanted upon, but this growing slow, they proposed to return.

All were 'bulls' in that little select company. Harry Somers was a chronic 'bull,' and with singular infatuation—the characteristic of all genuine 'bulls'—returned to the charge again and again, and never would give in; the consequence was that he was almost always losing money. He was now a large 'bull' of 'Beloved' silver-mining shares and 'Backaway' bonds. So well did these 'look' that Somers bought more and more—speculatively—the higher they rose. He was now in his element, and appeared a model of a young Hercules as he sat outside that four-in-hand.

Powerfully built, he could be very passionate and impulsive when roused. His white hat (without the black band—Harry saw no sense in *them*) was thrown back, and his sunburnt features contrasted strongly with a broad white scar on his forehead, the remnant of a sword-cut he had received in a duel in Bungaland. Ralph sat by his side, and was fast getting into better form. Somers played the cornet to perfection. The clear, ringing notes he produced with such thrilling effect echoing amongst the woods, and then back from the far-distant hills, with Undone's noble river rippling at their feet in the clear moonlight, caused the maddest among that merry party to pause and listen. It mattered not what air he played, the same magic touch awakened in the bosoms of the gayest there reflections. All seemed startled when, after lisping Freddy Stanley, who sat next him, had quietly asked, 'Will you give uth the "Latht Rothe of Thummer"?' its first few notes seemed to arouse sentiments which had long lain dormant in the hearts of all. They heard

him to the end; he then handed the instrument to Stanley, who took it from him with a childlike reverence. All were now so still that the measured tread of each of the sixteen hoofs could be distinctly heard by a practised ear as they lightly touched the surface of the level road. The 'insider' broke the constrained stillness by informing his neighbour, a new protégé of Walter's, that 'Dearies have bust!' There was a *movement* in their midst; the spell being thus rudely broken, it was not long before they were all in full swing. Nothing was talked of but 'bulling' and 'bearing' Stocks, Rails, Mines, &c. Now it was Great Southerns, then Little Westerns, again Northcity A's, Derricks, Grums, Tritons, Fopvilles, Westports, Alleys; again Trucks, Backaways, Liquorice, Elypts; and lastly Beloveds, Zincs Regulars, &c. &c. They were all full of it. There was a bottle-washing company of Walter's, a boot-cleaning company which he had fathered, a house-letting company which he patronised, besides several others of which he was either Director or Promoter. Everything was to be done by Companies. There was 'The Wife-finding Company;' one—called 'The Doctor-saving-apparatus Company,' by which small people were to be brought cheaply into the world—was 'Walter's own;' 'The Baby-rearing Company' came next; then 'The Child-instructing;' after that 'The Thought-communicating,' which was to save time and trouble to children and tutors. Then there was 'The Self-advancing Company,' of which character all the others partook, more or less—most more; 'The General Employment-finding Company,' and 'The Do-everything-for-' (should have been *and*) 'Everybody-at-the-smallest-cost Company;' to be followed by others, until, in due course, came 'The General Winding-up Company,' guaranteeing to absorb all the others, and take you out of the world, if you felt so disposed, as quickly—more so if you liked—and as decently and cheaply as another had brought you in. All seemed at home and happy. Markets must go on rising. Late heavy losses would be soon retrieved, and a handsome profit left. Ralph was a whip. The team paced merrily along. They caught the spirit, as though they shared the glee, of the party. Crack went the whip; they burst into a canter. The load was like a feather behind them. Another crack, and up a hill they rattled at a hand gallop, but were soon well in hand and steadied into a magnificent trot. With the bright moon still shining overhead, and such a racy, rattling lot, Ralph now asks himself, 'What thing in the world more delightful than a Gambler's life?' The 'insider' looked knowing, and, commanding attention, recounted such wondrous tales of fortunes made. 'And lotht!'

sighed Freddy in his corner. None, however, heeded him. Town was at length reached, each pledging the other over a parting glass not to close accounts before mutual agreement. 'Ha! *nous verrons*,' I overheard the 'insider' say aside. What could he have meant? In the best of humours, and with no dismal forebodings now, Ralph got the 'latest prices' at his club.

'Hullo! what's this?' I heard him exclaim aloud. He read, 'Failure of a large dealer is announced, with a very heavy account open "for the fall,"' and a sharp rise in certain Stocks, Ralph's among them, on his closing his account—three per cent since he left. 'What a stroke of luck!' thinks he.

'Fail on, ye dealers, fail away!' cried Ralph; 'let me get out with a good profit, and I'll say good-bye t' ye for ever—ha, ha!'

He was too excited to sleep. He dozed a little; gold was tumbling about in bagsful. Ralph sat sceptred in the Vortex. Fifty jobbers stood around begging for time to meet their heavy 'differences.' Ralph gave them time, and they were merry over it, and they all sang, 'For he's a jolly good fellow.' And as he was stooping to pick up some of the gold, it all seemed to melt away, and he heard a jobber laugh, 'Ha, ha!' and then they all vanished—not a single coin could be seen. He ran after one jobber who had a bag of Ralph's gold on his back, but he got away down into a vault, the doors of which opened and shut by magic; he kicked at him as he descended, but the door slammed and caught his foot. The pain was terrible; not a jobber was now to be seen. He screamed and awoke with fright, to find himself only half undressed, his foot fixed in a large furniture boot-jack, his boot half off, and himself in an uneasy position across the arm of his easy-chair, into which he had fallen while trying to draw off his boot. The candle had burnt out; the moon was still shining brightly; he struck a light—'twas three o'clock. He took up the newspaper again to satisfy himself, for he thought it might be all a dream. Yes, there it was; he pinched the paper, tore a corner off to convince himself it was real. 'Failure of a large jobber! Three per cent rise!' stared him in the face. Drinking a tumbler of cold water, he undressed by the moon's light, then drank another, and was soon in bed and fast asleep.

His morning's *Age* confirmed the news. There could then be no doubt about it. 'Depressing effect in "business" circles brought "business" to a standstill,' &c. &c. But that view did not weigh with this young Speculator. He became seized with a sudden desire to sell, and cut it all—his heavy losses were more than fully covered. 'Hurrah!' cried he; 'pluck has it, after all! I'll go to—to—to—*Her!*'

Full of this wise resolve he hastened to his broker's office. It was full. 'Strange,' thought he: 'so early too!'

An ominous air of excitement prevailed; he wished all good-morning; not a response was heard. 'Hum—funny,' he muttered, looking from one to the other, but they took no notice whatever of him. He began to whistle a tune. Suddenly he felt a sharp tap on his shoulder, and Walter beckoned him in silence to follow him. With mysterious air he led him through a dark passage into a little room, Ralph slashing the walls with his cane as he went along. He closed the door, and confided to him in the briefest terms the cause of this sudden change.

'Great failure in the Vortex,' said Walter, eyeing Ralph keenly.

'I know—I know. What's that to me? I'm going to close my "things" at once—am here for that purpose. Where's—'

'It's everything to you,' interposed his brother quietly. 'All your stocks are open with that dealer—besides other clients, and his affairs are in a wretched state.'

Ralph shuddered.

Chapter VII.

'I came not to hear this: I am struck with sorrow.'—Shakespeare.

'It is everything to you. All your stocks are open with that dealer.'

Ralph heard—he attempted to rally; he even cried aloud again, 'I'll suffer.' But presently the little room swims round and round, the portrait of a beauteous child as he saw it hanging on the walls at Old Trememdon—a child now grown to womanhood—flashes across his excited imagination, and then seeming suddenly lost to him for ever, his heart beats against its fleshy walls, as though endeavouring to escape its too narrow confinement, or be at rest for ever.

Maxwell keeps on talking; Ralph heeds not, the atmosphere of that little room stifles him; he rushes past, out into the open air of heaven, to seek whom?—to do what?

With bursting brow he paces those hot city courts, and crowded lanes and thoroughfares, aimless, purposeless, and sick at heart.

Regardless of passers-by, reckless of what may become of him, he wanders he knows not whither.

Then the Spectre soliloquised: 'And is that you, Ralph Osborne, who only last night, in the heyday of fancied successful Speculation, were commiserating the poor drones you thought them, who were content to plod on in quiet, peaceful security, unmoved by the ephemeral brilliancy of that light, which, while it dazzles and glitters, strews the path with pitfalls? Would you like to exchange places with them now, Ralph Osborne?'

Ha! who is that on the other side of the way, gesticulating in such excited tones? Ralph knows the voice—'tis he; and his late broker leaves a friend to meet him; and even this seems a relief, poor wretch that he is!

John Brokum reads Ralph through at a glance. 'Bad failure that; not surprised either—been "shaky" this ever so long; won't pay sixpence, am told.'

Ralph's frame trembles, a cold perspiration breaks out over him (how he despises his weakness!). Brokum, perceiving his distress, reminds him of the balance due at the next 'account,' and concludes with the then usual Vortex pet saying, 'I am sorry yours was so truly an unfortunate account.'

Chapter VIII.

'Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part, sir, of myself, and what remains is bestial.' —Shakespeare.

'By robbing Peter he paid Paul . . . and hoped to catch larks if ever the heavens should fall.'—Rabelais.

And the big dealer did not pay sixpence; but Ralph's new broker and his brother shared his commissions between them. And he paid his late broker a very large 'difference' indeed, not examining any 'accounts,' and he was obliged to part with a very great many good sound securities to do so. Freddy Stanley was also very considerably 'bitten' by the failure. Now, there was 'a very old and respectable firm' of brokers,—'old established and most respectable.' Sir, enough! These brokers would not speculate! Oh, no, 'the very name they dreaded.' So said the promising young Vortex satellite, formerly at the head of the clerical department, but who had since joined this firm so 'old and respectable' on the retirement of a partner. Ralph had introduced his friends to this firm, and they did business for them in all the things they could put in their way; for they were so 'highly respectable,' and set their faces so against 'Bits-of-Paper Swindles,' 'Panic Swindles,' 'Rig Swindles,' &c.

&c. &c. Stanley had authorised this junior partner of promise to sell some shares he had recently bought out of the proceeds of a trifling amount of 'plunder' due at the end of an 'account.'

'But you mutht get my prithe, you know,' said Stanley, in rather a business-like way for him.

The satellite just wanted that number for a 'client,' he said; but he must charge a commission; he would take care about the price, too.

'Hum! Thtrange—very,' mutters Stanley as he walks away. Meeting Ralph, he mentioned this remark of the satellite.

'Do they not always charge commissions, Stanley?' asked Ralph.

'He hath never failed to do tho yet, and many are the commithionth I've paid him,' replied Stanley.

This junior partner was to go into the Vortex, and if he could get them no cheaper it was to be a 'bargain.'

The two 'pigeons' divined that, in spite of markets, it would be a bargain.

The Spectre soliloquised at the time:

'Young Vortex satellite—the Spectre begs pardon, fully developed Star!—never talk about charging commissions when it is usual! Let your best friends think you honest,—it is their pleasing delusion. Now, blushing Star, pale as thou wert wont!'

Need the Spectre inform you, sir, that these 'pigeons' set about inquiring immediately in several places to make sure, and found that honestly the Satellite could *not* give Stanley his 'prithe,' that the shares in that old-established financial concern did not 'move' once in a fortnight, that they had not had the slightest tendency to fluctuate all day; that nevertheless, on entering the office of this firm so 'very old and most respectable,' the junior advanced to meet him in the most orderly, matter-of-fact, 'business'-like way, told him, 'Oh, that's a "bargain," Stanley; *I could not get them any cheaper in the Vortex!*' handed him the 'contract' just signed by himself; that Stanley ran out and told Ralph, who advised him to make sure of it, and buy them back; that he did so through brokers who were not by any means 'an old-established firm,' at—notwithstanding the double commission and jobber's turn—a good profit to himself; that, informing the junior partner in the firm so 'very old and most respectable' of his exploit, he did blush and look confused, but had his reply ready, as what broker in those days had not? And ought he not to have looked happy, for had he not just gained two commissions instead of one, and put into Stanley's pocket the profit which, had he been as honest as he certainly was

promising, should have been his client's? And, sir, this young partner in a firm so 'old established and most respectable,' this sworn broker,—what could they have sworn to in those days?—was as fair a type of Undone Vortex morality as was here and there to be found!

Chapter IX.

'Till their own dreams at length deceive 'em,
And oft repeating, they believe 'em.'—Pryor.

And the markets were mounting higher than ever, and Ralph, Stanley, Slasher, and Somers, who, but for the failure of that wretched jobber, would have stood so well by this time, were out of it all. They got no sympathy in their hard fates. Victims did not say much to each other during the process, while the Vampyres themselves had too much on hand to afford time to commiserate the wretched beings on whose life-current they were feeding!

Months had passed away. The four had left Undone for that fashionable watering-place Triton, and were comfortably housed at Mrs. Scrubberway's.

'Why Triton?' his friend Fullheart, who was down at the time, asked of Ralph, as he and his wife met the four promenading together on the pier.

'Well, it's near and handy, you know, and I'm worn and jaded. That horrid Vortex!' replied he.

'Ah, my boy, you wouldn't listen to a fellow who is old enough to be your father. Why, it's nothing new, Ralph!'

'Then why don't they put it down?' asked the dejected youth.

'Why don't who put it down?' asked Fullheart in turn; 'it's only fellows like you keep it up.'

'But the Government ought to stop us, then! they've put down gaming-houses and betting on the turf, where a fellow can see for himself which horse wins too, and here the biggest villany out—for it's *based on secrecy*—they wink at! I—'

'Don't talk too fast, my boy; they've all got their difficulties to contend with.'

'Difficulties be ——!' and I'm afraid he used 'bad langwidge' and forgot the presence of a lady in his wrath.

'They're a pack of thwindlerth,' put in Stanley, 'and the Government'th ath bad for permitting it. Why, if I bet on a horthe I can thee for mythelf if he winth, but I can't go into the Vortecth! If we could, we'd thoon let 'em know, eh, Ralpth?'

Everybody laughed, and Mrs. Fullheart most of all, while he continued gravely,

'Thpeculation 'th *Pecu*lation, ath thomebody thayth—ain't it, Ralpth?'

Everybody laughed again, and nobody more than Freddy himself.

'Ralph, my boy,' said Fullheart, 'don't allow yourself to be carried away by your feelings.'

'Oh, I'm too jaded to talk; let Stanley go on. That beastly jobber, too, failing like that!'

'It seems to me,' said Mrs. Fullheart, 'if you want to make money on the Undone Vortex—don't you speculate!'

The roars of laughter with which this little remark was met put everybody into good humour.

'Did you ever play with loaded dice, Mr. Stanley?' asked she of Freddy, looking at him quietly; 'I have, just for the fun of the thing, and I assure you the effects were magical.'

Amidst the merriment caused by the lady's remark, Stanley said:

'No, I never did, madam. But really your thimile ith firtht-rate; what with commithionth and the dealer'th turn, and the marketth to move, before you get a penny yourthelf—and who maketh them move but the fellowth inthide?—and when you do get the correct tip and thingth go right for a bit, thome beathtly dealer failth, and doethn't pay thicpenth!'

'It seems to me,' said the lady, laughing immoderately, 'you have been playing with loaded dice, Mr. Stanley.'

'Oh, we all have,' said he—'very mutth loaded all round.'

Mrs. Fullheart now pressed Ralph to come and stay with them; but he said he was engaged with his friends, whereupon they all excused him. He, however, seemed determined, and it ended in a succession of visits between the two houses.

One afternoon the Fullhearts called upon the four young fellows, to propose a day's hunting. Mrs. Scrubberway conducted them with a mysterious air to the drawing-room, which had a beautiful sea-view. Immediately after they were seated, Stanley entered the room with an expression of great concern upon his youthful features.

'Do come,' he said, 'and lithten to Ralpth, he'th going mad!'

'What! where?' asked the kind-hearted lady.

'In hith room; but the door'th open, you can hear all. I think he mutht have had an apparithion!'

Fullheart and his wife followed Stanley on tiptoe; Slasher and Somers were standing outside, listening. Ralph was walking

up and down his room. They could see him between the hinges; he was clasping his hands and standing in theatrical attitude, his bright, florid complexion flushed with excitement and his eyes wearing an unnatural brightness. One hand was raised, while the other was playing involuntarily around his lips and moustache.

'What a picture for an artist!' said the lady. 'What eyes, what warmth, what fire, what soul are there!'

'That is reality!' said he; ''twas that!' Both arms were raised on high, as though to catch some inspiration from the skies. 'Again?' he asked appealingly; 'ah, yes, again—now come!' his arms gradually lowering themselves to his shoulders. He remained in this attitude for several seconds, passed his hand across his brow, then stood like one rapt. Placing one hand upon his heart, ''Tis there again!' said he, pushing his hand through his long, fair, curly locks which fell on each shoulder. Seizing a pen, he wrote: 'I'll cast its fevered frenzy to the winds' (stop) —'hurl its dread fascination far from me' (pause)—'break once and aye its deadly spell!' (shudder). 'I fain would trample out its latent glare, while combating its fatal power; and, waging war to death, urge each and all to aid my desperate task. Such is my waking dream!' He ceased.

'Stop him—oh, stop him!' whispered the wife. 'Now, Mr. Stanley, do stop him!'

'He'th going mad—I know he ith.'

'Hush!' said her husband, 'listen.'

There was no time to act. Stopping short in the middle of the room, Ralph said aloud in trembling accents, 'But ah, whene'er I sleep, 'tis then I seem to think the most—think, as with vivid, wakeful consciousness. Made more intense by fitfulness, my sleep's embittered by the past. I dream of all those stocks, which, failing the courage to observe by day, now rise on every side to ridicule my weakness! "Why did you flee?" they ask; "why not retrieve your loss?" They're rising now,—I see them in my dreams—up twelve per cent or more in one short week! I shudder at the thought. My Stocks—my very own—conveyed in black and white—in contracts all my own—stamped, signed, and reckoned in fabulous amounts! "Subject to the laws of the Undone Vortex," each runs, so crisp, so new, so plain and business-looking! Ah, see! each phantom-contract dances round my head. "Look what you've lost," they cry; "full twenty thousand pounds in one short week!" I strive to groan, "That jobber!"—my throat's too dry to speak. With hissing breath one phantom-contract spits, "Never say die!" "Pluck has it!" shrieks another. The phantom chorus rings—

'Die hard! die hard! die hard!
Who would be rich, themselves must pave the way.
For curs we've no regard.
We're off—nor will we with a poltroon stay!
Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!'

He ceased, and seemed relieved when it was written down.

Shortly after they were all assembled in the drawing-room.

'Ralph, my boy, hounds meet to-morrow—Cross-Roads. Will you all come?' asked Fullheart.

'The very thing!' said he. 'As for myself, I want to dull this brain of mine.'

'Let's go and look up some animals, then;' and Fullheart was glad indeed to lead the way.

Chapter X.

'I have set my life upon a cast,
And I will stand the hazard of the die.'—Shakespeare.

'Ralph, we leave Triton to-morrow or next day for Nearbourne. Favour us with your company,' said Fullheart to his young companion the next day, while returning from the hunt. 'Quiet, you know—very; but fine downs; hunting, too, and lovely scenery. Do you know Nearbourne?'

'You are very good; but—'

'You see,' said his friend, 'Triton is full of birds of prey. It is rather difficult for an unpractised eye to distinguish them, as they skim along the surface of their own well-known hunting-grounds, from wholesome pigeons and good jackdaws. Come to some quiet place where the Vortex will not occupy all your thoughts.'

'Oh,' said young Sanguine, 'I should be much cleverer next time; I should ask about the jobber—I—'

'Very clever, doubtless; but—'

'It would take a knowing fellow to get round me again, I can tell you,' said Verdant.

'Fudge, Ralph. You don't believe it.'

'There's a lot of money to be made upon the Vortex. Look at that brother of mine. And if that cursed jobber hadn't failed now—'

'But he did fail, Ralph.'

'But he can't again; they won't let him in.'

'Don't be too sure; they do funny things on the Vortex; there's no control whatever over them. Look at Markham's case.'

'Why don't you tell me about Markham's case?'

'Have you not yet heard about "the league of six" who conspired together to rob one poor devil of an "outsider"?'

'Not I.'

'Uncommonly plucky fellow, that Markham. He had 'em all up before their Committee. His broker had introduced some pettifogging clerk as "*a neighbouring broker.*" By their united advice, and his broker's collusion, Markham was led into speculations of abnormal magnitude, in which the fellow was, of course, interested. Oceans of lies were told; that's nothing—the Vortex thrives on lies. False names were appended to his contracts. He had them up before the Committee. Collusion was abundantly proved. The men were posted in the Vortex as having been guilty in aiding and abetting "the kind neighbour" to acquire "*large illegitimate profits*" at Markham's expense. Some of them kept a double set of books, and the Lord knows what besides.'

'Good heavens! Were the men transported?' asked Innocence.

A roar of laughter followed this remark from all the others, who had been quiet listeners.

'Tranthported!' exclaimed Stanley, bursting with laughter. 'Well, Ralpth, you are green!'

'Hang it! why didn't Markham indict them for "*conspiracy to defraud*"? I would, and have got them into chokee any way.'

'No, you wouldn't. Just listen—'

'By Jove! I would, though,' said Ralph, interrupting his old friend. 'I don't care what you say, I'll take my—'

'Just listen,' interrupted his friend warmly. 'Markham was an uncommonly plucky fellow. He challenged the Committee through the Press. They never dared meet him. His lawyer—a young lion for pluck, when pluck can achieve anything—'

'What then?' demanded Ralph eagerly.

'Just this. The gang of Undone Vortex conspirators was shielded by the Committee of the Undone Vortex itself! The young lion was a bold one; but he was a prudent. He had a reputation to keep up, and he would not see his client dragged through the dust and mire fighting that grim Committee. That's what then,' replied Fullheart warmly.

'Fighting the Committee! Fighting it! Didn't they help him to prosecute the villains? You say they posted the fellows.'

'The Lord love you, Ralph, for your innocence!' exclaimed the old man. 'The Undone Vortex Committee help an "outsider" to prosecute a member!' The old man could hardly proceed for laughter, in which the others all joined.

When it had subsided, Ralph quietly said,

'Oh, I see now; they're all the same, and to-morrow might be dragged up before their own Committee. That's why they make it so easy! Still, I'd have had a shot. How did Markham know he had the Committee to fight?'

'The Committee sent him a letter—ah, here's a copy Markham gave me.'

'Introduce me to Markham,' said Ralph excitedly.

'With pleasure—it's from the Secretary—Fid-fad Lukewarm. Here's the bit: "*The Committee desire me to express also their great surprise at learning that . . . . you have instructed your solicitors to institute criminal proceedings against the parties charged.*"'

'Was that in Markham's case—the league of six?' asked Ralph in tones of wonder.

His aged friend replied solemnly, 'No other!' and turned upon him with a look of triumph.

'Well, that's lively,' said a voice, now heard for the first time.

Somers had hitherto been a quiet listener; he now asked, 'What did they do, then, to the "posted" wretches?'

'Villains!' said Ralph, correcting him.

'Oh, stop!' cried the old man; 'don't call them—'

'I will call 'em—villains they are. What do you call 'em?'

'I think you're not far wrong,' said the old man, after a pause. 'A Secret Institution, like the Undone Vortex, exercising gigantic, irresponsible, and overwhelmingly important powers, ought not only to be above suspicion, but the very secrecy which attends all its doings should make it scrupulously jealous of the honour of all its members. But what do we find? They are too cankered with the lust of gold to give a moment's consideration to any sound principle—to say nothing of motives of an elevated character.'

'I heard say, that they got "the neighbour" to bolt, which relieved the others and baffled the Committee,' said Slasher; 'and that the tedious investigation was consequently much curtailed.'

'True,' said Fullheart; 'and they expelled him: he goes by the name of "Neighbour" to this day; he's an "outside broker," so look out! The others got various terms of "suspension," which amounted to nothing; for they still do "business" as before, by going to the threshold of the "House" in the same way as you and I do; and the public, who ought to be put upon their guard against the robbers, are none the wiser.'

'And thith in the thity of Undone! Oh, thpare my blutheth!' cried Freddy, spurring his horse ahead.

'What did Markham get?' asked Ralph, as they put their horses into a trot.

'The Committee wouldn't carry out their own law upon which he had based his claim to justice—in fact, they refused point-blank. He could have got justice in any Law Court in the land, and every fraudulent contract annulled according to the heading of each. Oh, yes! let me not forget: the Committee passed a Resolution, by which his broker had to—that is, if he liked—*yield up some of his commissions.*'

'And that I call adding insult to injury,' said Somers. 'If I ever find my broker at any of his little games, you won't catch me bringing him up before his Committee!'

'I shall haul mine up before a jury of my own fellow-countreemen,' cried Ralph.

'And I, and I,' said all the youths.

'Catch 'em first,' said Fullheart. 'That's the job: it's all in the dark—*with closed doors*, recollect that. Ha! ha! ha! ha!'

'It should be a national affair,' said Ralph; 'it's the most important interest in the Old Countree.'

'It thhould be open, like the Thugar or Cotton Mart,' cried Stanley.

'John Bull is the most patient old fool in the world,' halloo'd Somers.

'It shall smash up,' cried Ralph; 'hang me, if it sha'n't!' His eyes flashed so, I thought they would have started from their sockets.

The morning before the four young men separated was a Sunday. Ralph was going on a visit soon with the Fullhearts, to Nearbourne; and he promised Captain Slasher to meet him in town as soon as he returned. He had conceived a liking for the quiet young dragoon, as he thought him, and the feeling was mutual. They were all sorry to part; and as they were brothers in misfortune, they had become 'wondrous kind.'

Strolling along the beach, Somers related to the party, in a state of high glee, his new piece of luck, conveyed in a letter and 'contract' received that morning. Though 'Backaways' had not yet reached par, and 'Beloveds' were not so 'good' as they ought to have been, he had made quite a little fortune over a new spec, and was dilating on the means he proposed adopting in order to get rid of it in the shortest period possible.

'I'm for church, I think,' said he; 'where's best shop?'

'Follow in the direction of some melancholy bell, distracting the ear and doling forth its misery,' said Ralph. 'A horrid row to make on God's own day.'

'There's Saint—somebody's or another,' said Slasher, 'where you get it high, but very dry.'

'Or mild who-d'ye-call-it's,' put in Ralph; 'the low and slow.'

'Or, again, old Goodfellow, the broad and thhallow,' chimed in Stanley.

'Which, in my humble opinion, is a misnomer,' pursued Ralph. 'I think him broad, and deep, and very wide; eh, Somers?'

The Bungaland soldier thought a moment; then said, 'And very charming—no humbug. Let's go now, what d'ye say?'

'All right,' said Ralph; 'but what about this "Backaway"?'

'Well, ninety-six I bought a lot at yesterday.'

'Think you there's any chance that they will stay?'

'The old, they'll pay at par—the new, they may.'

'Or—mayn't,' responded Ralph. 'Come, let's away!'

Chapter XI.

'And thus I clothe my naked villany
With old odd ends stol'n out of Holy Writ,
And seem a saint when most I play the devil.'
SHAKESPEARE.

'I SHOULD "turn out" some of those "Backaways," were I in your place, Captain Slasher—I hear they're a "rotten" stock,' said good-natured Frank Fullheart, the morning of the departure of himself, wife, and friend for Nearbourne. Slasher pressed the old man's hand, and promised to think about it.

Although Captain Slasher was heir to great wealth and a title, his father was very loth either that he should play the fool with any of the former, by anticipating it, as his cousin Freddy was doing, or run any chance of disgracing the latter. He had lost a great deal of money over the Undone Vortex, and sorrowed a kind father's heart;—one result of which was, that Captain Oswald Slasher was in a chronic state of hard-upedness.

What occurred immediately after the departure of his friends for Nearbourne was this. During the temporary absence of his two companions, both of whom were doing their best to aid in the process of dissipating the newly acquired little Vortex fortune, one of the milder sort of looking birds—a hawk—with plumage much deranged, and feathers all awry—a very old acquaintance of Slasher's, and one, too, who had known him and his family for many years—was quick to perceive the bent of his desires. Somers

was absent, or he would have said, 'Cut that fellow, Slasher!' This half-fledged creature commenced operations in the true, orthodox, and duly recognised style. First of all, he ran down all Slasher's former brokers, former friends, and former ventures of whatever kind. Recounting how enormously he himself had been swindled, much sympathy was interchanged. There were a parcel of villains, he said, on the Undone Vortex—men who, being patterns of generosity in their neighbourhood, and of honesty amongst their tradespeople, would, the moment a pigeon lighted near the doorstep of their offices in the city of Undone, pluck every feather he had off him! How this seedy hawk chuckled at the thought of a half-commission pigeon; how he demonstrated to Captain Slasher's entire satisfaction that his brokers, Messrs. Eezie, Meekface, and Eezie, were the very opposite to any he had ever known before, and were everything that could be desired; how he mourned over Slasher's losses—he had had so many himself, before he knew his present brokers; how Captain Slasher listened to 'hope's flatt'ring tale,' agreed to look in at Eezie's office, only in case of need, you know, sir; did look in, by appointment—this man was so friendly that he was in earnest—Slasher had no idea that he was interested—he was, though, by the bye; how in an incredibly short space of time Captain Slasher, and Ralph Osborne too—for they had agreed to meet each other again—were both to be found haunting this office, and asking prices as of yore,—are matters of common history.

Now in the days I'm speaking of you couldn't expect a man to keep his office open, give you 'prices' every ten minutes if you liked, a warm at his fire, and even a glass of grog occasionally (oh, horror! in Undone city at twelve o'clock!), besides a read of his financial periodicals, and you not to deal! The idea's absurd. He looked for it; you couldn't escape from your linendraper's under a shilling's outlay, and was an immunity to be attached to the office of a broker on the Undone Vortex?

'Can I do anything for you? I am just going into the House,' might have been asked in dulcet tones once or twice, but not repeatedly. Besides, recklessness begat recklessness. With fellows rushing in and out each moment, the excitement naturally increased. Whether brokers kept dummy clients to incite the genuine but sluggish pigeon or no, it is impossible for one so little posted in the 'secrets' of 'office' as the Spectre, at this distance of time, to determine. One thing is certain, that in the office in question 'business,' in the days I am speaking of, could never be done fast enough. Hours passed like minutes. Young fellows bent on gambling thronged the place. One settled his

doubt as to whether 'bulling' or 'bearing' a stock was the tip by a toss.

'Man, sell Tritons; 'tis lovely woman; buy me ten thou.'—speculatively of course, with no intention to pay, oh no! Another fresh from some knowing shop thus proclaimed the news: 'I've got the tip—buy Dearies—great rise on!' 'Sold you mean,' says a third. 'I guess they've got their return ticket!' A toss settled that. 'Ha! nothing like a toss! Southerns are down!' cried another.

'It would be rum,' exclaimed a sorry-countenanced, disappointed gambler, 'if a toss never turned up trumps!'

'Heard about Northcity A's? backing the rise with a cool ten thou. in the "House." I've got twenty thou.;' while a newcomer apprised them of the fact that '"Homelies" are "needled" at last! I'm a bear—hurrah!'

If these reckless young fellows made a trifle one 'account,' it was gone the next,—Speculation and Thrift not often shaking hands,—their habits being expensive and dashing, until the inevitable 'clear out' scattered them broadcast on the wide world.

Of course something was soon found for two such eligible pigeons as Captain Slasher and Ralph Osborne to turn their attention to in such an office.

St. Luke Meekface was a fair type of the pushing, pious Vortex broker;—a Saint not of the Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John tribe—their breed had long since departed, and a new race had sprung up! These did rejoice in 'purse and *scrip*' to a very large extent! These had a great many coats apiece! These knew very well indeed where to lay down their heads—which HE whom they professed to serve (!) did not. These lay down their heads in such peace and serene quietude, and on such downy pillows too, after a day spent in 'victimising' the unwary, while their dupes lay upon beds of fever, of madness, or of death—and death was much better! Oh, it was marvellous, sir, what a change had come over the Saints since the time when they used to 'hunger and thirst after righteousness;' for when these thirsted—and they often did—it was after the good things of this life, to wit—good cheer, good 'bitter,' and good whisky punch!

St. Luke Meekface had a very clever knack of drawing young fellows into a 'venture,' he protesting all the while with upturned eyes against all Speculation in the abstract, the demoralising habits which it engendered, and the losses and ruin it involved! Declining in one breath—in such a clever way too—to do any more business for them, he would call one 'a very plucky fellow' the next moment, when he had agreed to do it.

All he did was done as a favour, with a weary, gloomy expression of countenance which was humorous and absurd. An odd make-up was St. Luke; he would point to a man going along the streets of the city of Undone, and say in self-depreciatory, saintly tones,

'Ah! there goes a man ruined by Speculation!'

'How so, Luke?' a youngster would ask.

'I told him,' the Saint would reply, 'once upon a time I thought "things" were going worse. He acted on my idea—it was right—he made a small fortune in no time; after that he never would pull up, and—he got ruined!'

The Spectre soliloquised:

'Yes, and he took to drink, and he neglected his family, and wanting more drink and more money, he forged a cheque! To pull up and retrieve was out of the question with St. Luke's victim! To avoid earthly disgrace he cut his throat. And St. Luke Meekface calmly expected to be allowed to recline gracefully upon Abraham's bosom after that! and perhaps administer homœopathic doses of water to cool the parched tongue of—his Deluded Victim!'

The two pigeons now heard that St. Luke attended his Sunday-school and chapel regularly, and didn't like him any better for that; also that a pet, shrewd young clerk of his did the same. This rising clerk protested *à la* Meekface against all speculation whatever; but yet, with singular clearness and ability, pointed the way!

I presume it is scarcely necessary to inform you, Mr. Bull, that under such fostering influences these two pigeons found the allurements and attractions which in those days used to beset a Speculative Vortex broker's office as fatal there as at any other. Then the time arrived when the fascination over losing money became as great as that experienced in making it, and this the brokers possessed the art of facilitating to an extraordinary degree, and in a most uncommon manner; and in St. Luke's office, and under his supervision, it was carried out to perfection!

The pigeons clubbed together; what one did the other did, and to an equal extent. They became 'bulls' and 'bears' by turns, just at the wrong time, of course! Then came the inevitable 'wind-up;' and with dejected air, this pious Vortex broker asked the two into that offshoot of the Undone Vortex—his private room!

He closes the door—no listeners now, for he is going to be serious! Solemn and melancholy is the air of this pious Vortex broker! They watch him. He had only been telling them a day or two before what a grand dividend the Triton Railway was

going to pay, and that *he* was looked up to universally in the 'House' as an oracle in such matters; and of course they bought ever so much, and of course from that moment 'Tritons' began to fall;—pious Vortex brokers formed no exception to the rule. But see how sad and doleful the man looks! Why, what a sympathetic man this Vortex broker is! how he feels for them in their distress!—much more than they appear to do for themselves. Well he ought, they both think, for he never put them up to any 'good thing' yet, and never kept them out of any bad. However, not liking to see him cut so truly a ridiculous figure—just as though he were the loser—they assume the cheerful.

'Well, market's bad, I s'pose?' says Slasher; they are 'bulls' now, of course!

In a husky, tremulous voice, and deep melancholy tone, this broker replies, 'They—are—indeed!' and is then silent.

The atmosphere seems heavy, a weight like a pall settles on their spirits. They still put on the cheerful. Surely they will never reproach that meek creature with having been the cause, either remote or immediate, of their present misfortunes! They do though. And now this broker looks so abased, so shrunken that they half repent it. 'Well, I'll suffer!' says Ralph again, and puts himself into heroic attitude. The higher he draws himself up, however, the more does this meek man abase himself.

'Anything more?' asks Slasher, 'coz if so, out with it.'

And he does out with it. Turning suddenly towards, but not looking at, his Victims, preferring to encounter the red-hot coals in the grate, for instance, he adds in a low shaky voice,

'*We shall be wanting more "cover" from you both. I'm sorry to see the markets going against you so*—'

'Oh, shut up, Mr. Meek—'

'No; hear what he's got to say, Ralph,' urged Slasher.

'Go it, then,' says Ralph, flinging himself on a chair.

After a pause the Saint continues: 'And to see you dropping your money like this! And indeed I often almost resolve to do no more Speculative business for any one, and were it not for my partners I would not. I wish I were out of it! No child of mine shall ever become an Undone Vortex broker.'

The pious Vortex broker's manner was touching—it was fatherly! Ralph handed him a cheque for his share, and concluded that Slasher had done the same. And this Saintly broker goes to his stately mansion, from which, after enjoying a good dinner, he sallies forth to preside at some meeting whose special object is—Charity! heads the list of donors with a handsome

subscription, which, but for Ralph and Slasher and such as they, would knock at his door in vain!

And a settled frown had established its lines upon this pious Vortex broker's brow—a frown induced not by pondering over the fleshly vanities of a sinful, wicked world, but stamped upon it by a consciousness of carrying on a 'victimising' traffic, and more deeply engrained by a vivid, deadening sense of the vast number of youths whom he had lured to destruction!

Years afterwards, when many of the actors had passed away from the scenes of this unhallowed traffic, and others had narrowly escaped from that scathing abyss, Ralph heard that this Vortex broker of pious memory had dissolved partnership with his old friends Eezie and Eezie, had taken the young, shrewd, rising, pious clerk into holy partnership with him, they both doing a roaring, 'victimising' trade together in a pious, holy kind of way, all the old Saintly resolves not to do such 'business' being forgotten and scattered to the winds! And Ralph asked himself how it could be that a 'victimising trade' was not at all the correct thing as done between a pious old Vortex broker and partners who, making no profession of religion, were at least as honest as those who did, and yet could be justifiable and proper when carried on between said pious old Vortex broker and said shrewd, rising, pious young Vortex broker; and also what there could be in the training of the said young Vortex broker by the pious old Vortex broker to account for the difference?

Chapter XII.

'I pray you, think you question with the Jew;
You may as well go stand upon the beach,
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
You may as well use question with the wolf,
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;
You may as well forbid the mountain pines
To wag their high tops, and to make no noise,
When they are fretted with the gusts of heaven;
You may as well do anything most hard,
As seek to soften that (than which what's harder?)
His Jewish heart.'—Shakespeare.

'Crashum Hall, Oakshire, January —.

'My beloved Boy,—Please take steps immediately to stay those villanous proceedings of the lawyers of Eezie, Meekface, and Eezie, Vortex brokers in the city of Undone, who have lodged an Attachment against all moneys, &c., due, or ever to be due,

arising out of all rights, titles, and claims (if any) whatsoever, on the strength of your presumptive succession to my estates and title, in satisfaction of a balance said to be due to the above-mentioned firm of Vortex brokers, Eezie, Meekface, and Eezie, on a certain "Speculative account."

'I feel the annoyance to which they are daily, nay, almost hourly, subjecting me deeply.

'Not only have they taken proceedings here, but they have lodged another "Attachment" in my agent's hands in Undone city, in satisfaction of the same demand! They, the said lawyers, have obtained an order from the Lord Mayor of the city of Undone to inspect my agents' books, hoping by such means to have some clue to *bonâ-fide* property of yours, either now or prospectively. They are doing everything in their power to make things as unpleasant to me and them as possible. They hand in open documents of a threatening character for all their clerks in the general office to see, and in every way are acting in as low and blackguardly a manner as can possibly be conceived. I am sure, my dear boy Oswald, you will at once see the necessity of making some kind of arrangement with such people.

'I remain, my beloved son,

'Your heart-broken father,

'To Captain Slasher. 'OSWALD SLASHER.

'Come down and see me at once!'

'Well, Captain Slasher, that looks like "business,"' said Fullheart to him, the moment the dejected young dragoon put the letter into his hand for perusal.

'Damn the chapel-goers!' said Ralph impetuously.

'Gently, Ralph!' interposed Fullheart.

'The rascals! the scound—'

'Stop, stop, stop, my boy; a fool can call names. Don't get hot, there's no need, I assure you. I have as much contempt for your late Vortex broker as you can possibly entertain yourself, but I hear he says he was treated badly.'

'Of course he'll say that; he led us into specs—but what's the use of talking?—damn the chapel-goers!'

'Hush, my boy, hush! chapel or church goers, it's all one on the Vortex. Have a proper respect for all creeds. We have much for which to thank the chapel-goers, as you call them, in the past.'

'I owe them nothing but a heavy grudge. My ancestors helped kill a king!' replied Ralph warmly.

'Kill a king! But how?' asked Fullheart.

'Signed his death-warrant,' said Ralph quietly; 'and now—to-day—the reptiles help to spoil me! I have nothing to thank them for,' he continued scornfully.

'You see you shouldn't be led; it's their business to lead. They live by leading fellows like you to their ruin.'

'What!' exclaimed Ralph. 'Well, damn them, then!'

'Don't swear, Ralph,' said his old friend warmly; 'cut the Vortex, and let them be; blame yourselves, I say, if—'

'Well, of all the wheezing, self-abasing, misery-loving cant-mongers I ever heard of—oh, commend me to St. Luke Meek-face. Thank God, they're not all like him!'

'Nay, hear me out, Ralph. I'm as sick of the subject as you can be; but when I see young fellows like you wasting your powers of mind and body on those licensed gambling houses, those city hells—'

'Come, come, I say—that's going too far,' interposed Ralph, taking his old friend by the arm.

'Those Undone Vortex brokers' offices, and, I repeat, those LICENSED CITY HELLS!' urged the old man, regarding him steadily, 'these are no times for chicken-heartedness. Who would be free themselves must strike the blow! If you young men refuse *to act*, at least hear an old one *speak*. I again repeat—those Licensed City Hells!—the terms are synonymous, and I don't care which you use. Men like you two now before me, knocking your money down right and left—becoming a prey, in some instances, to the most frightful disorders of mind—don't interrupt, Ralph—I have seen it,' continued his old friend, in a voice husky with warmth, and trembling with emotion. 'I have seen it—ah, yes! my poor boy!' He laid his hands upon the young men's shoulders, and gasped forth the words, 'It is time to speak out, and I should be no man were I to remain longer silent. What are all you young fellows doing for your Countree's good—all of you—for you are fast becoming confirmed Gambler s? You produce nothing—you do no good to any one; you are exercising your powers which God gave you for high and useful purposes in the most degrading manner. What I fear for both of you is that you will ere long become birds of prey yourselves! You know "Bitten by a Vampyre makes a Vampyre"—nay listen,' said the old man, with passionate vehemence; "I have been patient hitherto—I can be so no longer, when I see you both being whirled off into the very Vortex of Speculation! Long have I desired to tell yon this—I can withhold it no longer.'

'Look here, Fullheart,' said Ralph, his eyes flashing fire, the colour mounting to his cheeks, while one hand was upraised to heaven, and the other clutched his friend's arm with a grasp like a vice; 'I'd sooner go tiger-hunting with a plain dagger only, than be a Vortex Parasite !' His attitude was so theatrical and yet so lifelike, I myself could have clasped him in my lean Spectral arms. He was the very image of another dear old friend of mine, then in Spectreland—his father. His voice became hoarse with emotion as he proceeded. 'It is a Vortex ! See how it whirls and eddies *within the closed portals* of that—Oh, what am I saying ? And yet I feel ever being drawn in—DRAWN ! What a fool I am to rave on so ! you must think me mad, Fullheart. Sometimes I think I am getting so. Who gets all our money ?—ours—for all of us get ruined. Where does it all go to ?' he asked excitedly, pacing up and down the room, first looking at his friend, and then regarding Slasher, who had remained silent throughout, with a look of earnest commiseration.

'Who !' said the old man, 'why, the men who live in those big houses at Loud Park—at Queen's-gate—in Swell's Quarter, or in that highly-respectable, God-fearing neighbourhood, Tranquil Vale; who keep their second establishments at Triton, Fopville, Hillsborough, or Bracing Wells; who keep their dozen hunters, their yachts at Buttsgate or Bulls, and who take their box at the opera for the season ! These are the men who are supposed to live upon nominal rates of commission, and yet go in for the most expensive houses, and indulge in well-appointed equipages and costly entertainments ! Who so lavish of expenditure as these men ? They live by Spoliation—everybody knows it—yet they move in Society, are examples of respectability, patterns of generosity, and no end of great men in their own eyes, and in those of their fellow-men, both high and low !' quietly replied his friend.

'Oh ! I can't get out of the Vortex,' said Ralph ; 'I despise myself, but it's of no use. Why, only just now I felt so tempted ; I met a fellow who has no interest—in fact, no view at all, he says—'

'No view ! and a Vortex broker !' exclaimed Fullheart.

'Yes, but quite different to—'

'A Vortex broker without a view !—say an honest broker at once—do, to please me,' said his old friend. 'A man honest as brokers in other callings are honest, selling for you in the dearest and buying in the cheapest markets ! Don't you believe your best friend if he tells you he has met such a man. A broker without a view—ha ! ha !'

'Well, hear me out,' interposed his young companion.

'With pleasure, Ralph. A broker without a view—ha! ha!'

All three men laughed heartily, while Ralph proceeded; 'Laugh as you will, he's always right, this fellow is—"things" always fall after a stiff rise. If you were to sell a lot of "Dearies"—'

'Dearies!—me! Aha! aha! do you want to see your old friend ruined?' gasped the old man with horror at the bare mention of the word; 'I wouldn't touch them with a pitchfork! I never had a "Deary" in my life, and never mean to have!'

'That don't matter a bit,' said Ralph, gazing into vacancy. Pausing he smoothed his disordered locks from off his brow, and proceeded in jerky sentences. 'See, Fulheart—sell as though you had—buy—buy back—when they've—got quite low—and when—when—you don't want to have—to-morrow—next week—week after—'tis done—pocket the difference'—(pause) 'and—and—and—your fortune's made!'

'Ha! ha! ha! ha!' the Spectre laughs, 'ha! ha!'—forgive! I'd heard something like this before, somewhere.

'Sell a quarter of a million "Deary" shares,' quickly pursued Ralph, 'let 'em go down ten per cent—don't wait a minute—buy back—it's a certain thing!'

'I'd do it, but I'm cleared out by Saints!' roared Slasher, now speaking for the first time. 'And I've had to make a "compromise"—that is, say something to qualify the assertions I made about their practices, or they would have made me pay "to the uttermost farthing!"'

'What! tell a lie?' asked Ralph, in horrified amaze.

'Just like Markham did,' said Slasher; 'his lawyers told him it meant nothing—his rascals would have gone over the seas if he hadn't!'

'Had I been Markham, I wouldn't,' said Ralph.

'You would have done just what Markham did, it strikes me,' said Slasher quietly; 'and I say! how these Saints can grip! But it's all in the dark, mind!'

'How many shares has this "Deary" railway company in all?' asked Fullheart, 'and where is it?'

'Nobody knows—doesn't matter; they buy and sell such "things" twenty times over during the day in the Vortex—it's a "rig," Fullheart!' said Ralph.

'Oh, as to that,' cried Slasher, 'you might start a thing yourself, and call it Bogies; get a "quotation" and "settlement,"—'twould be a fortune; the name would take, too! "Bogies" would be quoted "flat" one day; that would bring in buyers, no one

knowing why. By Jove! I'll—' recollecting his father's letter, he stopped short.

'I'll make a note of what you say. You must allow,' said the old man, 'it might go all the other way: your friend without a view—pardon me for laughing, Ralph, he is such a novelty, almost a contradiction in terms too—may have imbibed an incorrect view; to be consistent, we'll say not his own, but somebody else's wrong view; and if Dearies went up instead of down ten per cent—'

'Dearies go up ten per cent! impossible!' exclaimed Ralph; 'the "thing" exists—over in the Great Countree somewhere.'

'Perhaps so, but since no one knows how many shares this Company has, the Speculation looks, upon the face of it, hazardous in the extreme; however, I'll make a note of what you say,' said the old man quietly; and turning to Captain Slasher, he inquired, 'May I ask you, without offence, how this ugly Attachment business came about?'

The young dragoon officer, who had latterly preserved a stolid look in the further corner of the room, now advanced, and said, 'With pleasure, sir. The governor knowing, so I presume, my —hum—er—propensities, keeps me rather short. I had paid everything up with the exception of a balance of far less amount than their commissions came to. The Saint having lured me on, I, like a fool, was weak enough to beg for consideration, which he refused. As he had sold some of my "things" without authority, I resolved to oppose his claim. The Parasite who introduced me, and who, I find, gets half my commissions, informed him of the nature of my private affairs; and hence—the Attachment! This is, I hear, the way they generally go to work, and the bite of these chapel-goers is like *the crunch of a shark*, I can tell you!'

All three men laughed at the simile, and Fullheart remarked, 'The friend of your family put the Saint on your track, then!'

'No other,' was Slasher's reply.

'Why didn't you make a row about the things they sold without your consent at the time?'

'Oh, Ralph will explain all that;' and Ralph said dreamily, 'Why, yes, when they've got your "cover" they can do just what they like, and if you want to make a row they dart off into *Alsatia*, and you cannot enter there!'

'Oh yes, it's an unequal battle!' and the young dragoon sighed wearily.

'Then leave it, my boy,' said the old man, advancing and embracing the stalwart young soldier. 'Seek for revenge in other fields, amongst foemen worthy of your steel, not amongst Vampyres!'

Chapter XIII.

'Dreadful it was to see the ghastly stare,
The stony look of horror and despair,
Which some of their expiring victims cast
Upon their souls' tormentors to the last—
Upon that mocking fiend, whose Veil, now raised,
Show'd them, as in death's agony they gazed,

. . . . . .

. . . features horribler than hell e'er traced
On its own brood.

. . . . . .

"Ye *would* be dupes and victims, and ye *are*.
Is it enough? or must I, while a thrill
Lives in your sapient bosoms, cheat you still?"'—Moore.

Now I saw that the brokers in the Undone Vortex never moved a muscle of their faces while they were sacrificing their Victims; they kept down all the feelings with which Nature had endowed them, while their Victims writhed with the most horrible contortions of countenance as soon as they got away from their Victimisers for a brief respite. If ever they gave their Dupes a thought, they sat grinning the most hideous of grins amongst themselves. Nature's great laws could not, however, be trampled upon with impunity. Sooner or later some outburst was sure to occur. Some of the Great Spoilers outdid themselves, and brought on diseases of the Heart and Brain. Such men had a semi-demoniacal expression called 'the Vortex type!' It was as unmistakable as it was sickening! Heart Disease and Softening and Paralysis of the Brain (never softening of the Heart by any chance!) occurred so often, that a common saying amongst the inhabitants of Undone city was, 'Undone Vortex and pale faces!' —all the blood being required to work the heart, which did treble duty! When the brain stood the wear and tear, and was weak, and the blood refused to go down, they called that Conjestion! and 'Undone Vortex seediness!'

The natural passions, the flow of humanity, and the love of one's fellows had no place in the remnants of Soul these Brokers, Jobbers, Parasites, and Spoilers possessed. Doing violence to their natures, they were never happy! Excitement was all they lived for. Hundreds of young fellows—'authorised clerks' and jobbers—used to meet in the 'ticket' room, an appendage of the Vortex under their 'House,' and gamble to their hearts' content. Thus was formed a Vortex within a Vortex. Here—the ruling passion being insurmountable—they gambled and betted among themselves, had their regular settling days, and dealt in millions

of stocks and shares, &c., as though they were hundreds! Every pound sterling was reckoned as a penny, and when a fellow was 'hammered,' or couldn't pay his 'differences,' he was subjected to the ignominious process of two kicks apiece all round on the spot where little boys are flogged at school! The securities which each held consisted of umbrellas, greatcoats, &c. When this was discovered, the Vortex Committee summoned the offending members and authorised clerks to the Committee-room with a view to expelling them—what for, the Spectre never could understand. Were they not profiting by the bright and noble examples of those shining lights, who, because they happened to be Committee-men, were in the possession of unlimited powers? Were not the Committee-men, with but few, if any, exceptions all gamblers on a grand scale, with this difference, they they being *inside insiders* were from that circumstance in a much better position to *gamble with certainty* than those half-fledged gamesters who were endeavouring, with such pertinacity and success, to tread in their exalted footsteps? while *these* did not injure or ruin the *public* by playing at 'football,' or in depressing real securities!

Little wonder, then, that nothing short of, say, a chase after a second ark floating on the top of another deluge would have excited their jaded nerves! They were 'used up,' they smoked, they drank considerably; betted freely on horses, boat-races, &c. They were so used to it, by reason of their training, that they did not seem to notice it. There were no such words as right and wrong on the Vortex; or respect or want of it inside their big 'House.' Woe, too, to the luckless wight who dared to resent any liberties taken with his person inside the Vortex! All, from the meanest, were 'hail-fellows-well-met' in this very 'respectable House.' 'Business' at all the other Marts was conducted with decorum and gentlemanly behaviour. In the Undone Vortex whipper-snappers of boys tugged at venerable locks, when their playful spirits moved them so to do, with impunity. Unfledged lads fastened cords on a level with tall, formidable-looking inhabitants' hats; said tall individuals running straight into the noose thus artfully laid would, on a given signal, find half-a-dozen fish-hooks simultaneously making of their hat a prey. Their hats whirled into mid-air, they would feel for their pocket-handkerchiefs to keep off the draught; but lo! these youngsters' 'playful ways' were not confined to hats, but extended to coat-tails, which, being looped-up behind, exposed what was certainly not visible during the performance of their morning toilette, viz. a pair of nigger's variegated 'swallow-tails' reaching down to the

ground. To be indignant was out of the question, unless ambitious of being instantly mobbed and roughly handled by a swarm of unruly insiders. And thus all members were privileged. But ought not all members of this the Great Vortex of the Great City of Undone to have been thankful, sir, for had they not just concluded a 'bargain' by which they had netted at the rate of fifty-five per cent per minute, and lent the funds thus accumulated at the rate of perhaps a hundred per cent from 'account' to 'account,' which meant a fortnight?

Captain Slasher was now hard up, and at Ralph's earnest solicitation he became his guest at Mrs. Scrubberway's.

'The sea-air will do us good, Oswald; come along, old boy.'

Slasher was too much ashamed to go down to Crashum Hall and meet his father; and as Ralph had just tumbled in for some more money—not won at the nation's betting-ring—depend on it, sir! he felt delighted to have it in his power to be of the slightest service to his friend. Ralph was getting to like Slasher, and he was a man to show his feelings upon all occasions.

'Come, Slasher, my boy, don't get low,' said Ralph to him the night they arrived; they had come straight from Fullheart's office, and Slasher's mind seemed oppressed with a sense of his father's and his own humiliation. 'What's your tipple, eh, Oswald?'

'Anything you like to order, Ralph, from Maraschino to thirty o.p. rum!'

'Do you like rum? I've got as fine a bottle below as ever you tasted in your life; none the worse for having journeyed round the world two or three times; I always keep it for my Triton friends.'

Midnight found the two sitting over their third bottle of thirty o.p. rum; Ralph had not taken much, and as he gave Slasher his arm—it being necessary—he said, as they ascended the stairs, which creaked with the weight of the heavy young dragoon: 'Here, don't forget the bottle; you might want a thimbleful before morning. Good-night.'

Leaving Slasher and the rum together, he retired to his own room, which was next his friend's, and separated from it by folding doors. He had not been asleep very long when he was awoke by hearing Slasher's powerful voice holding forth as if to himself. He listened, for he could hear every word distinctly.

'Account!' shouted he, in violent and uncontrollable manner, 'you shall account! Chapel-goer! I'll meet you yet! I'm going—going—going—fast, yet never fast enough! my body

once at rest, my spirit free, I'll haunt you night and day! No peace for you, and none for me!—ha, ha, ha, ha!'

Ralph trembled, the hoarse shouting of his friend shook the partition and everything in the room; he rose at once to go and see him. Before he had well got to the door the young dreamer, if dreamer he was, began again in fierce and withering tones: 'I'll meet you!' he cried, 'at your office—in your chapel!—at the races!—in your Sunday school—at your club—in your home. I'll be revenged! I'll break you all with gold—gold! The place I'm going to is full of it; the chapel-goers there are rich and numerous; the gold they have in store, the spoils heaped up, the "plunder" all secure, all—all are mine, to do with as I will, ha, ha! Ye Vampyres!' shouted he, with great volubility, 'red-mouthed, dripping, fresh from the slaughter of your Victims, I'll warn them everywhere! Your piety is rags, which ill conceal your villany. Off, off!' he cried; 'unworthy of my steel!'

At length all was silent. Ralph listened intently; nothing could he now hear but a slow, heavy breathing; he feared to move lest he should disturb and set him off again. Daylight was peering through the shutter chinks before he slept.

Chapter XVI.

'To know
That which before us lies in daily life
Is the prime wisdom.'—Milton.

In reply to a query put to him by his little sister Emma Louise, who having been swindled out of a good many hundreds of pounds in the well-known Undone Smash'em and Runover'em Railway debentures, into being a purchaser of which she had been inveigled by a cousin of hers, a Vortex broker, who got ten per cent, so it was said, from the Company for his trouble, invariably consulted her brother ever after, Ralph wrote as follows:

'My darling Em,—You ask me about a mine; I am no judge in such matters. I have heard, however, that though

Titles Kings may give, Honour they can't.
Titles without Honour are a barren grant.

I would also add that

A mine may titles lack—fatal dilemma!
A mine *sans* title—shun, beloved Emma!

'Your loving Ralph.'

After that Emma Louise Osborne did shun the mine, and no more was heard about it from her.

Seasons glided by unconsciously. Upon a fine June morning Ralph looked in upon Maxwell. Wonderful for him he was not busy. His office was free of 'clients:' Ralph had not the most distant conception that he was one, he thought he was his broker's only (cunning!).

He talked to his brother about that beastly jobber failing like that, and about Slasher having been sued for his 'differences,' and concluded by urging that as he was compelled to keep a large margin of 'cover,' and yet had no guarantee whatever on the broker's part, it was a truly one-sided affair. 'Explain that to me if you can,' said Ralph.

Walter was too much a man of tact and resource to attempt the impossible.

'Tell yer what, old boy,' said he; 'don't lament over the spilt contents of the milk-can. Look here, Ralph; I'm off to look at a mine; come and rough it with us, on every delicacy of the season, and you shall see as pretty a thing in copper as—well, as there is anywhere. Join my lot to-morrow.'

'And who's your lot?' asked Ralph.

'The Promoters, and, if it starts, the future Directors. The "*concession*" is mine. Be my guest. Don't hesitate, for I shall be proud of your opinion of the mine. We shall take soundings, and fix buoys over the conjectured vein; that done, home again; 'twill do you good.'

'Right you are!' said Ralph, without further consideration.

'Well, Ralph, I'm not a Speculator,' said Fullheart to him as Slasher and he called to apprise him of their intention to leave town, 'or I could have turned over a good many thous since yesterday morning, though not by selling a "bear" of Dearies!'

'How then?' asked Ralph.

'My neighbour, Old Makmunnie Eezie, is a Director of the "Longland Railway Co." He urged me to sell the dividend at five and a half yesterday. To-day I can get as much as I like at four!'

'Good heavens, what a fortune! didn't you do it?' asked Slasher.

'I'd lay a wager Makmunnie did,' said Ralph.

The old man smiled, as he quietly replied, 'I did not—it would have been a dead robbery on my part, Captain Slasher. All "bearing" operations are, and I would not be a party to one for an instant.'

'So are "bulling" ones too,' said Ralph.

'Undoubtedly! they are thieving operations when done by men in the position of my neighbour.'

'And yet they all do it,' returned Slasher.

'It's rascally, then,' exclaimed Ralph; 'you should see the nests of gamblers on the Vortex chattering away about these dividends, like a lot of madmen.'

'My boys, I'm very glad to find you're going out of it all,' said their old friend; 'but on no account have anything to do with this mine.'

'Trust me,' said Ralph.

'I can't,' said the old man, with feeling.

'You can't? you mean—'

'I can't,' repeated the old man sadly.

'Good God! is my case so helpless, then?' asked Ralph in horror.

'Ralph,' said Fullheart calmly, 'let me give you the result of a calculation made by my clerk, Mr. Huggins, showing within a few hundreds the sum I should have lost by "bearing" a quarter of a million "Deary" shares. They rose thirty per cent in a few weeks, and, could I have found Vortex brokers rash enough to have entertained my proposition, I should have lost, not gained, mind—or somebody would, as I could not have paid it—One Million Six hundred and Sixty-six Thousand Pounds.'

Ralph was silent for a moment, but starting suddenly up, he exclaimed eagerly, "Oh, Fullheart! if I had only been a "bull" instead, what a fortune I should have made!'

'But think of the miserable wretches whom you would have robbed, Ralph. Does all this speculation over "Dearies" do any body any good? Can it benefit any man, woman, or child in Undone city? Why should countless heads and hands be employed in conjecturing, wondering, calculating, imagining, and gambling on—THE RISE OR FALL OF DEARIES—'

'Or "Bogies" either,' interposed Slasher.

'I am sure I can't say,' replied Ralph; 'look'ee, Fullheart, come to the club, I'll get a friend or two, and let's spend the evening together.'

'No; come you and Slasher and see my wife. She's taken such a fancy to those eyes of yours, Ralph—'

'I'm jealous,' said Slasher, seizing his friend's hand and laughing gaily.

'My wife's young, you know, and—come along, both of you.'

'I'm always dreaming of *her* eyes, Fullheart,' said Ralph pensively.

'Good boy! I'll tell her; dream away!'

'I wish you would—ha. ha. ha. ha!'

Chapter XV.

'A merry heart goes all the day,
Your sad tires in a mile-a.'—*Winter's Tale.*

'We're off, boys!' cried Blazes Slasher, as the Venture, a smart little fore-and-after, left the wharf of Westernport City, being towed to sea by the favourite tug Lark, her destination being somewhere on the West Coast of the Old Countree. 'Walter's lot' were bound for 'The Hand-in-Hand, Coöperative, Pro-Rata Copper Mining Company, Limited.' Limited was to be the Liability of its shareholders, could they only be procured. Unlimited was supposed to be the Reliability of its Directors, while as to their Ability there was not the slightest shadow of a question.

The 'Hand-in-Hand was meant to be a swindle, as its Promoters, and some of its Directors, very well knew. Neither Slasher nor Stanley, Somers nor Ralph, had the faintest conception of it; nor was it probable that they would ever be requested to join the Direction.

Hard-hand Tappem, Esq., M.P. for somewhere up in the North Countree, Sir Watt Scroughem, Bart., and about half a dozen others, comprised Walter's lot so far. Sir Manfred Locock had declined Ralph's invitation, as he confined his voyages to fishing excursions upon the coast, he said, they being unhazardous.

Much attention was being bestowed by the merriest of the party upon a huge gentleman, of most 'respectable' appearance, in a white neck-tie. Judging from his appetite, he could have eaten next to nothing for days. He was not a Brother, neither was he a Quaker, and he certainly was not a Mohammedan. What was he? The Rev. Biorlmenes Getorl, M.A., was a Saint upon a grand scale.

Freddy began to enliven the company with a tale, but had not proceeded very far when Slasher interrupted him with—

'Come, Freddy, don't murder it!'

'Tell it yourthelf, then, Othie,' was the youth's reply.

'Well, then, you must know,' proceeded Slasher, 'there was once upon a time a Bishop, who, on giving his first diocesan dinner, ordered his butler to prepare for forty-five—'

'Twenty-five, Othie.'

'Oh, eighty-five. Well, it's all the same,' roared Slasher.

'Twent—' Freddy's voice was drowned by Slasher continuing,

'"Yes, my lord," said the butler; "and, please, is they to be i or low?"

'"Confound your impudence, what do you mean, sir?" asked his lordship indignantly.

'"Only coz," said John, in his usually quiet respectful manner, "if they's i—they drinks; if low—they heats."'

The Rev. B. Getorl, M.A., was evidently not 'i;' and most of the rest of the party did not seem inclined to be 'low' in this respect during their stay on board the Venture.

Introductions having been made at three that afternoon in Walter's office, Express train had brought the party to Westernport, where an addition had been made to it.

'Viscount Playfair, gentlemen,' said Walter. Ralph was overjoyed at meeting the brother of his great friend, and promised to renew his visit to Trememdon at the earliest opportunity. Being curious to know what brought the young guardsman amongst so motley a gathering, Ralph asked him. The Viscount stated that he was on his father's business, and was glad of the 'out' on his own account also, having been reading hard during the whole of that year.

He informed Ralph that his father was very much engrossed in Speculations, and that this was one Maxwell desired him to take up.

Mirth soon ran high. Walter meant all to enjoy themselves, and no one knew better than Maxwell how to cater for a decent lot of fellows. They were journeying free of expense, and to their entire satisfaction. The noisy ones drank; the parson ate till he was red in the face, but moderated his desires in respect of 'bitter' and 'cham.'

The Venture had bid the Lark adieu, the party had breakfasted, even the parson appearing satisfied at length, and the weatherly little craft was now breasting the waves on her own account, but they were rough ones, and getting bigger every hour.

Viscount Playfair reclined gracefully near the wheel, wrapped in his military cloak. Polite and affable when the conversation, taking a practical turn, aroused his interest, and sociable even when circumstances arose calling forth amenities inseparable from such an adventure, he had as yet said but little.

Lord Alfred, thought Ralph, would from the first have done the natural thing,—and by this time have been chums with nearly all on board. The youths performed feats of daring in the rigging, until the hourly increasing motion rendered it no longer possible.

A stiff nor'-wester threatened every moment to blow a gale. The Venture was stout, copper-bottomed, fastened, and all the rest, but had no steam to help her to forge her way to the 'Hand-in-Hand,' else the events which I have to relate would to a certainty never have left their mark upon these pages. She more than held her own, however, and all seemed in good spirits, which, if they flagged for a moment, they kept up 'by pouring others down.' Ralph, Slasher, and Somers were in their element.

'Now I am free and strong—myself once more!' shouted Somers.

'Begone, dull care, far from the Vortex door!' cried Ralph.

'Let'th make our "pileth," and cut it evermore!' lisped Stanley.

'Agreed, boys! now here goes—hip, hip, hurroar!' bellowed Slasher.

The wine circulated first round the table, then through the young fellows' veins, and nothing was heard but banter and chaff.

'A most impressive discourse!' Hard-hand Tappem, Esq. M.P., was heard to say to the parson.

A roar of merriment greeted his ear. Now, Hard-hand Tappem, who was fabulously wealthy, besides being 'highly respectable,' resented the liberty the youngsters were taking. Looking round the table, he said, with a scowl upon his hard visage,

'And a most impressive discourse it was. I felt I could say Amen to every word of it.'

This was a signal for a burst of laughter. Amid the general uproar, Blazes Slasher, feeling tickled, and considering the remark personal, rose and stared the offender full in the face, his splendid figure forming a striking contrast to that of the hard-visaged M.P. For a moment the others gazed upon the two in silence.

'Why didn't yer?' asked Slasher coolly, smiling comically at him. The others tittered, and then laughed outright. Feeling encouraged, he now shouted,

'Here, shall I say it for you? Here goes! Amen! three times three Amen! Amen!—'

A chorus of laughter drowning his voice, Slasher advanced, looking the impersonation of jollity and frankness, the other still frowning; but Slasher was irresistible.

'No offence, old boy,' said he; 'I'm rather taken that way myself sometimes.' Offering his hand, which was immediately taken, Slasher informing them of his constantly being called upon to hand the 'basin' round in church, and of the consequent diminution in the demand for threepenny pieces, he drawing nothing

under a shilling, it ended in the health of the M.P. being drunk with the usual honours, and peace and goodwill being cordially reciprocated.

Chapter XVI.

'A strong nor'wester's blowing, Bill;
Hark! don't ye hear it roar now!
Lord help 'em how I pities them
Unhappy folks on shore now!'—William Pitt.

The conversation became general, and, as the wind increased, Ralph went upon deck. The Captain looked anxious.

'We're not very far from my father's place now,' said the reserved young guardsman to Ralph on his approaching him. 'If this wind freshens, we shall be nearer by the morning,' he added with a significant look.

'Nearer! what can he mean?' thought Ralph; 'near — *her*, then!' He could not pronounce the name even to himself; but from that moment he kept aloof from his mad companions, and went no more below. Ralph, though young, was an old sailor, and as each puff of wind—now almost increased to a gale—caused the little vessel to heel over, a vivid sense of reality was imparted to the words the Viscount had just uttered. Knowing what he did of the nature of the Bluffshire coast, he trembled when he watched the gathering black clouds, and saw the sea rising more tumultuously every moment.

The Captain went below to report the urgent nature of the case. Slasher was the first to laugh at danger, and scorned the idea, which the Captain had mooted, of putting back. He was indignant at the bare idea of Westernport channel winds and waves defying him — Captain Oswald Slasher, of the 19th Blazers, only son of Sir Oswald Slasher, Bart., of Crashum Hall, in the county of Oakshire, and compelling him, the said Captain Slasher, to put back to a port of safety, and thus transforming what was to him a mere pleasure trip into an affair of 'business —every-day life! or, to use the words of Sir Oswald when he came to hear of it, 'Just as though his son, Captain Oswald Slasher, had been on board a common trader, or merchant vessel, and bound by circumstances which regulated undertakings of that sort! The very idea was absurd, sir! Why, the Slashers hadn't a drop of commercial, mercantile, or even nautical, blood in their veins, and never had had within the last thousand years. What happened before that time was not precisely known; but every

Slasher within that period born had been a Slasher, and to have been a Slasher was to have been a Slasher, and nothing more need be said than that! The Slashers were in the army, sir!—the army teemed with Slashers! They were a bold race, and a proud—proud of their race, proud of their achievements, proud of their valour, proud of their handsome, good looks, splendid frames, gay, dashing manners, good breeding, contempt for everything little; and proud, above and before all, of their Old Countree, and of their Old Countree's Queen!—Queen, sir! They loved her! with respectful reverence be it said; but they loved her with deep, lasting, personal attachment and affection; and woe betide the hapless man or thing that dared to question the real, abiding fondness of the Slashers for their Queen! The Old Countree was all very well, but what would the Old Countree have been without her Queen? 'Twas idle to ask, sir; and could such a state of things have ever arisen as any fraction of the people of the Old Countree desiring, in sober earnest, so to alter her fundamental constitution, as to endeavour to do away with the only real, lasting, and firm bond of union between all true Old Countree hearts, then would the Slashers have been found ready to a man not only to have defended the prerogatives of the Crown, but to have stood by their own beloved Countree in her hour of peril, and have thus preserved for her a beloved Queen, who reigned in the hearts of her prosperous, her devoted, her affectionate people!'

'He speaks plain cannon-fire, and smoke, and bounce.'—SHAKESPEARE

The mirth of the mine-seekers having been long very uproarious, it was all at once interrupted in an unexpected manner.

'Will you allow me, gentlemen, the liberty of saying one word?' said a voice, in quiet, commanding tones. All eyes were turned towards the speaker. 'This coast is perfectly well known to me,' continued the young guardsman, who was driven below by sheets of blinding spray; 'if there were the slightest hope of our being able to weather the storm which is now only commencing, I should not thus intrude. You may not be aware, gentlemen, of the gravity of our position.'

His little audience was for the moment stupefied. While his words were producing their effect, a voice on deck was heard high above the screaming blast:

'Hard a-lee!' It was the Captain's.

'Hard a-lee!' replied the helmsman.

A scuffling noise was heard, as of men running to and fro; a momentary confusion ensued accompanied by a strange, unusual trembling of the little vessel. A loud report was now heard right

over their heads, and then another. Slasher was on deck in a moment; he shouted to them below,

'It's the rag, boys, both—come up—missed stays !'

Ralph had witnessed the mainsail and fore-trysail ripped into fluttering ribbons; their great booms, which were flying about dangerously, were at length secured, and the Venture was soon flying before the wind with jib stowed, the foresail doing the work. A main stormsail was now bent, and she was hauled up in the wind, but the wild ocean gale bore her along towards certain destruction. Already the frowning rocks of the iron-bound Bluffshire coast were plainly visible, and a more rational feeling had succeeded—some of the pelf-seekers contemplating the scene with considerable anxiety. Ever since the disaster, the parson and M.P. had been upon their knees below; as the gale strode on the copper mine receded from their view, and they had for some time been wishing themselves at home.

Nothing, however, daunted the infatuated Slasher. Slasher the gay and irrepressible was irrepressible and gay still.

'Let us live till we die, we're not gone yet, old boy,' said he to the parson, who had now come on deck to know what were their chances of getting safe to land. 'Steer her right in the wind's eye, skipper; the parson can go below again, then.'

'But there's nothing but a frail plank,' urged the parson, with trembling voice and pallid countenance—his breakfast was several miles astern, and had been comfortably got rid of hours before, since which time he had done nothing but nibble at ship's biscuits, washing them down with lemonade—he would have added, 'be tween us and a watery grave.'

Slasher was too quick for him. 'Right you are, but there *is* a plank, you know—here goes !' cried he, pulling vigorously at the fore tack. The keen, glowing good-humour of this man was irresistible. The gale howled, and the billows roared; the fierce, bitter squalls lifted the tops of the seas in sheets over the devoted vessel; but there stood Blazes Slasher of the 19th, cool, imperturbable, defiant, and supremely jolly. A Victim of a hundred Vortex tricky meannesses he may have been, to which he had been forced to succumb; but fear had no resting-place in that heart of oak, so well, so deeply set in a frame of rude and rugged mould. The lioness just robbed of her whelps, pursued with the skill, the coolness, and the energy of the modern hunter, might show signs of dread;—the infuriated bull in the amphitheatre, goaded on to desperation, sorely pressed, and reeking with the blood of its victims, might quail at the sight of the ruthless matadore;—but never did this man, by word or gesture, betray the

smallest want of jollity or pluck during that day. Yet he never looked for applause. Of massive build and herculean frame, with just sufficient height to tone down the effect produced by enormous muscular development; endowed with vast powers of endurance, a fine, open, manly countenance, well-cut, solid features, a superbly thick, flowing moustache, and bright, honest, blue eyes,—Oswald Slasher was seen at best advantage when danger was at its height. Yet, strange to say, the very exuberance of his spirits had proved the great stumbling-block to his success. Few could ever be brought to believe that the man who was equal to talking any five ordinary men down, riding fiery and mettlesome horses over impossible leaps, scaling mountains without an hour's training with practised, hardy guides, and yet being as jolly as ever at the day's end, could have much in him beyond a fitness for pursuits which were purely physical.

'Capital fellow, Slasher; fine, noble-hearted fellow,' was the extent of the praise accorded him.

At Gashly Heights, and other places, where forlorn hopes wanted leaders, and he was dying to obtain the command, 'Too hot, sir; too hot, by far,' were the words let fall by his superior officer; and his choleric reputation following him, he sold out and left the service of the Old Countree, beloved and regretted by all who knew him. His burly form might now be seen by the side of Bill Torpsale, the steersman, filling a pipe and lighting it before putting it into his mouth.

'Well, Bill—cold water?' asked this Slasher of all the Slashers.

'Bad enough, sir,' replied the dauntless helmsman *sotto voce*, eyeing the bold young dragoon with earnest admiration.

Chapter XVII.

'But whether on the scaffold high
Or in the battle's van,
The fittest place where man can die
Is when he dies for man.'—M. J. Barry.

'Tis the rocket apparatus, hurroar!' shouted Slasher, with all the power of his stentorian lungs.

A cold shiver ran through the breasts of the parson and M.P. at the bare idea of so much *weight* and 'respectability' running any chance of being committed to so fragile and hazadous a contrivance, which would necessarily be suspended over the

foaming waves below for an uncertain period. There was no time for reflection, however. Figures were now distinctly seen hurrying along the coast. Slasher pointed them out to the pale faced representatives of so much wealth and respectability with such glee that they shuddered at his boldness.

'Is there no other way—none whatever?' whined the parson appealingly.

Slasher, who was bursting with laughter, roared, 'Lucky if we get that!' between two waves, and then, 'Won't reach us, skipper; it's life or death though, hurroar!'

'The cloth' (whichever shade it represented) was quite too far gone to do more than feebly attempt to rebuke him.

'Half a mile from shore,' said Captain Stratton, who was familiar with every inch of the coast; 'tide's half ebb; that's our only chance.'

'Oh!' 'Oh!' groaned the parson and M.P. simultaneously.

The roar on the now encircling reefs was so deafening that the wind could scarcely be heard; still onward went the Venture to annihilation.

'Luff! Hard a-port! Steady! Let her off! Ho! Breakers! Bre—!'

The awful crash which followed drowned the Captain's voice and stunned each one of that little band, as with a quivering lurch, a towering lift high in the air, and then a heavy crushing fall, all movement ceased. For some moments the consternation was great, as wave after wave, threatening all with destruction, broke upon them. Not a sound could be heard above the strife of the elements until the rollers receded, when shrieks of terror and despair were heard to proceed from the now agonised parson and M.P., who were both fervently apostrophising Heaven between each wave.

Although the moment was a terrible one, the sight appeared so ludicrous that Captain Stratton could not forbear a smile as he watched them holding firmly to the standing rigging, addressing each other incoherently at intervals, and then with upturned eyes, and in frantic tones, urging some power in the clouds, of whom they appeared in much dread, to intervene in their special behalf.

'Take to the rigging, boys!' screamed the Captain.

Some tried to ascend, others refused. When calm was in some measure restored it was found that the vessel had lodged on the highest ridge of a hidden rock, with deep water all around. The parson and M.P. had managed to crawl into the shrouds, and being now able to open their mouths without filling them

with salt water, were eagerly urging 'somebody to do something for God's sake,' but what, nobody could very well say.

'We shall be to pieces directly. No hope—none, sirs!' said the Captain to them. Whereupon they moaned piteously, 'Ugh, ugh!' and again implored, 'Do something—do something! oh, for God's sake, do something!'

'Not so fast, skipper,' roared Slasher, 'there goes the rocket! Can't reach—try again, my boys. There they are—devilish smart! Splice your lines!' shouted he, in tones of brass, 'splice your lines!—some chance then. No, not against this gale!'

'No use—no use!' said the Captain, in despair.

'You really ought to do something,' urged the parson, whose weight began to tell on his knees, enfeebled as they were by fear and long-sustained posture. 'I can't hold on here for ever. I really—must—soon—DROP!' shrieked he, in tones of terror, 'if something is not speedily done,' at the same time making an attempt to secure himself in the rigging by buttoning his coat in some inexplicable manner around the ratlins.

'Tappem,' said he solemnly, as he remained thus poised, 'I'm thinking of the ways of Providence, Tappem.' Tappem was considerably lighter than the parson, and the ways of Providence did not strike him as being particularly worthy of attention just then, but being 'respectable' he listened. 'Ah,' continued the other in doleful, tremulous tones, 'how inscrutable they are! Only to think that we should have come to this—us!'

'Yes, Getorl,' Respectability and Wealth combined replied, 'they are indeed past finding out. Oh, what's to become of all my money when I'm gone?—that is, if we are going, Getorl,—it's dreadful! What do you think?' asked the M.P., who, as the bare idea of leaving all his earthly possessions to others flashed across him, looked abject indeed.

'Very mysterious are His ways,' replied the parson in quivering tones. 'Oh, this world of wickedness,—this sink of iniquity! But won't they do something to save us, Tappem,—I mean without going into that nasty, horrid rock—?' To finish the sentence was too much for him; but whining forth, with blanched lips, 'Don't you think they ought now?' he waited for a reply. The M.P. not answering, he repeated his question. Hearing a scuffle on the deck, he turned to look below.

But there was a hidden power at work on board that little ship of which the parson certainly, for one, had no conception. It transcended in might, in sublimity, and in worth every influence that ever yet had wielded its potent sway, or moved the hearts of created beings! She, then, was near. Her image, as it was in

that picture,—as she must be now in life,—floated before Ralph's excited imagination; her smile, her presence, inspired him!

'Why not?' asked Ralph, almost embracing the Captain; 'I could swim ashore with that line.'

'And perish long before you got there. No, no, boys, we'll stick together, if we perish together,' said the Captain, grasping the boy's hand. 'If we had only one end of your deep-sea line ashore!' had said the Captain to Maxwell, and then had paused; and these words had filled Ralph Osborne's breast with one ardent, unconquerable desire. He saw at that moment but one image, his soul grasped but one idea.

'Swim!' roared Slasher, 'who wants to swim? We're right enough; this little sea—'

The sudden apparition of Hard-hand Tappem, Esq. M.P., put an end to the discussion. With the assistance of a couple of sailors he had brought to the feet of the group a large bearing-buoy, and quickly retreating again to his self-chosen post in the rigging, half-drowned with the breakers which curled upon the deck, he humbly thanked his God that He had been pleased to endow *him* with that amount of foresight, sagacity, and promptitude which had instigated him to act as 'a chosen vessel' in a moment of pressing need, and place within reach of the ardent young fellow at his feet the possible means of accomplishing, at a fearful risk, a feat which he lacked the courage himself to even dream of attempting. And, for the present, I will leave him and his companion-in-rigging to chant their psalms of congratulatory praise.

With inconceivable energy Ralph ordered the men to fix some sail-cloth to the globe at the top of the buoy, which was to be attached by means of a rope to his body, the life-buoy being securely fastened round his waist.

To all remonstrances he said abruptly and cheerily, 'The very thing. I'm on. Never know till you try.' And in an inconceivably short space of time he was lowered from the bowsprit into the foaming trough.

'Madness!' roared the Captain, who was far too brave a man to have willingly provoked by his mere idle words so rash an attempt. Everybody, with the exception of the two sailors whom Ralph, by force of will, had made obey him, seemed for the moment paralysed.

'Stuff o' nonsense!' cried he. His energy none could resist. As the picture of the little three-days-old floated in his brain, the cord which fastened the bearing buoy to him snapped! Away went the buoy towards the shore, and Ralph was being dashed

about over the reef in the treacherous surge. And now all awoke to the situation. The tide was ebbing fast. By a stroke of luck a sailor threw a running bowline right over his head, which he caught, and was thus prevented from drifting out to sea. 'Bring out your other buoy! Get out of the rigging and help, you landlubbers!' shouted Ralph. The two tried to descend, but the parson was so buttoned into where he was that he couldn't stir. All the rest worked with a will. The lines were soon readjusted, and a fresh buoy carefully lowered. Playfair implored Ralph to cut himself adrift, and leave them to their fate.

'Go with the buoy,—the line will sink you,' he cried vehemently.

'And leave her brother to perish!' muttered Ralph. 'With the line, or not at all!' shouted he from the briny element.

'You don't know the surf that's beating on that shore,—cut the line!' implored the Viscount.

Ralph heard nothing now, and when it was all done, when the wind was urging him fast on towards the surf, Slasher, now thoroughly alive to the reality of the situation, cursed his want of promptitude, and was only prevented from following his friend by force. The 'forlorn hope,' as Slasher ever after called him, gave a last look behind, and neared the shore at a rapid rate.

'My love to 'em ashore, tell 'em to get us something hot. Sing out when you're hurt, old fellow!' were Slasher's last words, as he was held back by half-a-dozen of his comrades.

Ralph looked towards the shore. Bluffshire natives were crowding the cliff, and descending it in a perpendicular place by means of ropes. That done, he saw them join hands with inconceivable energy, and interlace the rope around each other, forming a living chain. A slight, fragile form on horseback directed all their movements. Ralph gazed; it was a girl!

A hundred voices cheered the 'forlorn hope.' 'Hold out! be steady! Now, look out!' But Ralph was looking towards the cliff. 'Look out, now!' he faintly heard them cry. He saw a thin, long line of pale blue smoke high o'er his head, which, with a deafening roar, left its trail behind quivering in the gale. It shot towards the vessel, but, falling far short, it dropped, and now he saw a line floating between him and the buoy. Grasping it, he plainly heard a hum of applause along the shore.

'She's nearer now,' I heard him mutter. He strained a glance towards the beach. They motion him to pull; but no, that will not save his comrades! They bind a strong rope to the thin one, which he fastens to the line; he cuts himself adrift. 'I'll take my chance,' he mutters, the bubbling foam dashing against

his face, and brushing completely over him. 'Hurrah! it's done! and *they* are safe!'

A huge billow carries him on its crest with resistless force. 'To be so near the shore,' he mutters, 'and yet so powerless!' He hears a score of voices shout, ''Twas nobly done! Oh, save him!' These were women's voices. Half-choked with briny foam, he hears directly after, all along the coast, 'We'll perish to a man, or save him!' He hears each word distinctly, and then no more, for over he turns, and then he sinks below! He rises to the surface, but, oh, so feeble, bruised, and numbed! A pleasant kind of stupor seems to lull to sleep. 'Why not end it all here?' he muses; 'despoiled—ruined! I cannot hope to win! Shall I hold out? But, oh, those lips! to see them, and then to—' Faint and with a broken arm he strains another glance towards the shore. A girl is beckoning; he's sure of it! With one glance more towards the ship, he strives to push boldly for the shore. But helpless, with one arm dangling by his side, he rises on a curling wave,—is battered and pounded on the unfriendly beach. How hard it seemed to die!

No mercy had those waves. Stunned, crushed, he felt—he knew no more; but yet he seemed to think—ay, pleasantly.

A thrill shot through his frame. He stood within a castle's keep; the summer's sun had well-nigh set; with trusty followers all around, he's told the fortunes of the day. His well-used sword is at his feet; the arm which wielded it lies powerless at his side; while one and all press eagerly round to shower their benedictions on his head.

The scene is changed. A fairy, tiny hand has placed upon his brow a wreath of laurel. He strains his eyes to catch a sight of—lips, and she is gone! He seems disturbed. A lift—a curl—and he is sported back to days of childish innocence!

Chapter XVII.

'The rose is fairest when 'tis budding new;
And hope is brightest when it dawns from fears.
The rose is sweetest washed with morning dew;
And love is loveliest when embalmed in tears.'—Scott.

'Ha! how now? 'Tis reverie—or worse, if worse it is—delirium? Else, why that fitful, flickering light; that ghostlike form; those shadows numberless upon the wall, which come and pass away in utter silence, leaving behind deep shades of dark-

ness, still and unmurmuring as the grave, to haunt me with their presence, then mock me with their life—me—me?'

* * * * * * *

'Twas night, and in a darkened chamber, when Ralph thus mused. Phantom forms approached.

'Wake, wake!' one cried; 'the sea is rising fast. Once in, these waters ne'er will leave you.'

Voiceless he lay, all power of utterance fled. The waters rose.

'Get up. You're lost!'

From right, from left, from all around, a hissing sound approached, while clouds of noxious vapour quickened every sense. The phantoms pass away, then fitfully draw near—to mock, deride—then vanish. The blackness lingers; another night draws on. 'Listen!' he feebly murmurs. 'What heavenly strains! Not like those fitful, hideous dreams. Angelic music, too!' He hears a voice:

(*piano*) 'Soft summer winds, breathe peacefully,
And on a hero shed
Nature's repose, and tranquilly
Hover around his head.'

It stops. 'Go on,' he whispers tremulously. He strives to move; but, half-choked and powerless, he lies quite still. Again he hears:

(*cres.*) 'God grant that soon to health restored
His noble life may be;
For far surpassing earth's reward
Is Inborn Gallantry.

(*agit.*) 'O'erflow his soul with ecstasy;
Not yet his spirit free
Who saved a dread calamity—
(*forte*) So brave and true is he.

(*dim.*) 'Grant quietude and calm repose,
(*piano*) With Thy sweet presence near;
(*agit.*) Fill his warm heart and 'suage our woes;
Dry the fast-falling tear.

(*cres.*) 'Yet should that form no more be seen,
Should his short course be run,
(*forte*) Worthy of Countree and of Queen,
(*piano*) E'en then "Thy will be done"!'

'Is this delirium—madness? Then both be mine!' Calmly, on hallowed thoughts reclining, Ralph slept.

Chapter XIX.

'I do not love thee, Doctor Fell.
The reason why I cannot tell;
But this alone I know full well,
I do not love thee, Doctor Fell.'—Tom Browne.

And all at Old Trememdon Castle were joyful; for Ralph Osborne had spoken a few coherent words to his numerous friends gathered around his couch in his darkened room. But little was said, and that little not above a whisper, according to the doctor's strict injunctions. A week had now elapsed. The patient had been very quiet hitherto; when, to the great astonishment of all, he said aloud one morning in excited tones:

'I tell you what, I must have another doctor; this fellow is killing me. That horrid ether—ugh!' he shuddered, 'I'll take no more. And then, Pills Nostrum gives me nothing but ices, and creams, and beastliness! My head is splitting, too; and, look here, Slasher or somebody, I'm blubbering like a child! I can't help it. "Unused to the melting mood," you know. Dear, dear! how horrid!'

The Viscount stooped by his bedside while Ralph whispered in his ear. Somebody else was at once telegraphed for, and in due course came. He had passed a dreadful night, with his head supported on the young Viscount's shoulder and arms, in which position also they were surprised by Dr. Macjoy at five the next afternoon.

'Macjoy's the boy for my money,' sighed Ralph. 'And look here, Macjoy, give me something to eat and drink, too. I've had nothing for a year. A chop and bitter! I'm not used to this sort of thing. That man has been half-killing me.'

Macjoy ordered his patient a chop at once.

'Oh, and bitter too,' implored Ralph.

'And bitter too,' said Macjoy, who, binding his patient's head with a towel soaked in a mixture of arnica, spirits of wine, and hot water, had the pleasure to find his young friend so much relieved towards evening as to be able to converse quite cheerfully.

'How long will it be?' inquired Ralph.

'Please God, please God, not long,' said Macjoy. 'Take all the rest you can, and "wire" me if I'm wanted.'

'Can you not stay at the Castle?' inquired the Viscount. 'We shall all be very pleased, I am sure.'

And Macjoy 'wired' to his brother in Undone to request him to look after his patients during his absence, and enjoyed the quiet Trememdon retreat, a change being needed by the hard-worked young doctor.

'I shall be ready for a chop in another hour,' said Ralph before he had swallowed the last mouthful.

'Spoken like Ralph,' was Slasher's remark to the 'forlorn hope.' 'I'm not good in a sick-room; but Osborne, my boy,' said the young dragoon, pressing his friend's hand warmly, 'you are the finest fellow out! They call me game; but your quiet self-possession beats gameness to fits!'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said Ralph gaily.

Whether it was the result of the chop and bitter, or whether it was merely a chance circumstance, Ralph now began to open his eyes and look about him, and discovered that he was in the Trememdon library—the room of pictures. He grew pale, and then again as quickly flushed. His bed had been extemporised in the library during the excitement and consternation of the night of the wreck. It was on a level with the great old hall, and was convenient and easy of access to the many willing, anxious hearts and hands who were constantly busied about his welfare. Ralph all at once looked so fatigued and jaded, that Freddy came up, and lisped in his ear,

'Can I be of any thervith, Ralpth?'

Conscious that his couch was immediately beneath all that he had ever seen of *her*—for he could not be sure about the girl he saw on horseback on the cliff—he replied languidly,

'Move my couch round, there's a good fellow. Yes, so,' said he; and they all helped.

'Ah, yeth. Now look at thothe pretty pictureth,' said the artless youth, pointing to the middle one.

Feeling the colour again mounting, he did not raise his eyes again till they had left, when he looked, and found his idol gone. A sense of emptiness stole around his soul. 'Is she anywhere?' he asked himself.

The Spectre soliloquised, 'Ah, Marchioness, Marchioness! and yet you loved so when you were young!'

She was not there; and Ralph sighed for no more chops and bitter.

Chapter XX.

'No angel, but a dearer being, all dipt
In angel instincts, breathing Paradise;
Interpreter between the gods and men,
Who looked all native to her place, and yet
On tiptoe seemed to touch upon a sphere
Too gross to tread, and all male minds perforce
Sway'd to her from their orbits as they moved,
And girdled her with music.'—Tennyson.

Harry Somers, the hero of two duels, was already dying with love for Ralph Osborne's imaginary idol. Slasher, whose heart had borne the shock of many a desperate onslaught, was bending at length, like the willow grafted on the oak, the humblest suppliant at her shrine; while Freddy had been lisping his sweetest little nothings into 'her tinieth of little earth, you know,' as he told Oswald in the strictest confidence.

And Ralph had not yet even seen her. And where, thought he, was Lord Alfred? where was Maxwell? where the Marquis?

Soon again summer breezes circulated freely in that room which had so nearly proved a death-chamber to Ralph.

'Oh, Reginald!' exclaimed he one morning, 'the joy of being able to look once more, even with shaded eyes, upon the beauteous, summer-tinted landscape! Did ever trees stand out from hedge-rows, or cattle browsing upon the sward beneath the dark elm-tree, loom as do those yonder? The very clouds seem changed; and all for me! All Nature smiles afresh.'

'It is born again for Ralph, so near "the valley" has he been,' quietly replied his friend.

It was Saturday. Macjoy had ordered Ralph to walk, and Reginald accompanied him. A pony and groom attended them while they strolled in the fine old park.

Viscount Playfair was thoughtful and Ralph was pensive. Both being young, however, they commenced to talk upon the subjects nearest their hearts. The Viscount began to love Ralph Osborne with the manly warmth of an ardent temperament, for he admired his dauntless, devoted daring. They had reached a high headland, commanding an extensive view of sea and undulating cliffs, crowned with noble and picturesque plantations; here they sat down. Yielding to the impulse of the moment, the young Viscount exclaimed bitterly, 'Ah, Ralph, how I despise myself!'

Now Ralph's thoughts happened at that moment to be centred upon one problem, which he had no means of then solving. Was the girl whom he saw on the cliffs the sister of the man who now

sat beside him, because, if so, she must be at the Castle? As he thought this out, a thrill shot through his frame, but he showed no sign of emotion. True, it was within the bounds of possibility to ask that brother. But Ralph Osborne had a fashion, peculiar to men of his stamp, of thrusting himself outside the range of possibilities; he did not ask that brother, but, in a moment more, he felt a hand grasp his, while he heard a voice saying,

'And I, who by nature am so much better fitted to grapple with the waves than you, to have remained behind, irresolute! Oh, what a lesson you have taught me!'

And Ralph trembled. The voice was not Alfred's, but it was Alfred's brother's! In another instant the two young men were warmly embracing each other, the Viscount exclaiming with a manly outburst of passionate feeling, 'God bless you, old fellow! You have taught me to be prompt!' while Ralph, blushing, insisted, ''Twas nothing—indeed 'twas nothing at all!' And yet Ralph Osborne could not ask *her* brother the simple question which lay so near his heart!

'I am so glad our expedition to the Copper mine failed,' said the Viscount gaily.

'So am I,' drawled Ralph; his thoughts being evidently remote from copper mines.

'Indeed,' pursued the Viscount, 'my poor father has enough to think about without troubling himself with any new Speculation, to judge from the multitude of "Speculative accounts" and "contracts" which by chance I saw in his study this morning; his table was literally covered with them! It was a horrible discovery, I assure you; they all relate to the Undone Vortex!'

'I should think so,' said Ralph carelessly; he was still in the clouds; 'where is Alfred?' asked he.

'Climbing up Terribleazo, I believe; out for a couple of years at the least,' replied the Viscount.

'Indeed!' said Ralph contemplatively.

'A mania for Speculation has of late years seized upon my father—in fact, ever since Alfred introduced Maxwell to him; but,' added the young guardsman sadly, 'I did not think it was so bad as this—it's truly horrible! Do you ever speculate?' he asked of Ralph, regarding him with a look of earnest confidence.

Ralph shuddered. Must, thought he, the demon follow me everywhere? Is not Old Trememdon free from its blight? In a moment every word which had just been uttered recurred to his mind. Returning the gaze of his friend, he, with trembling voice and excited air, exclaimed,

'Speculate! oh, Reginald! I hear it whisper even here! a

something in the air ! Cursed be it to thus pursue me with its venom ! I thought I had left it for ever behind, never in thought even to be again led into the unequal contest, in which I was ever worsted ! whose battle rages in the thickest darkness, with green-eyed Vampyres for your mortal foes, who, while you grope about in the unaccustomed blackness, bewilder your senses by lulling you to stupor, fasten and prey upon you, drawing your life-blood, sapping your energies, and overwhelming you at length in a wild catastrophe of ruin and grief !'

The Viscount was horrified—so utterly unprepared was he for this. A cold shudder ran through his frame as he listened to the passionate utterances of his friend, who wept and laughed by turns, and then relapsed into a fit of gloomy abstraction.

'With Parliament sitting,' continued the Viscount, after a while, 'my father ignores its existence, so engrossed has he become in this mania. His manner too, once so genial, is changing most painfully. I dread to think of the future !'

'Oh !' said Ralph convulsively, the perspiration standing in drops upon his forehead.

'Maxwell and my father are very much mixed up. I believe he intends purchasing, *speculatively*, a large number of shares in a silver mine called "The Beloved."'

Ralph started. The Viscount begged him to say at once if he found the conversation too fatiguing. 'Oh no, go on,' said Ralph.

'Maxwell and my father talk of nothing else, and he enters into it as he does everything else, with all his heart. Do you know anything about the mine ?' asked he.

'What all the world knows,' replied Ralph. 'The Minister from the Great Countree was a Director; his Government compelled him to retire; there is a hitch about the title too !'

'You don't say so ! Maxwell declares the Minister has publicly given out that he still holds to all his shares as a proof of its *bonâ fide*, and of his faith in its future. What is your half-brother ?' asked the Viscount.

'I do not see very much of him,' replied Ralph; 'we were separated for many years; but I think he's very clever.'

'So do we all,' pursued the Viscount with a sigh.

For some minutes they sat in silence, gazing upon the glorious prospect. At length Reginald said,

'My father and Maxwell leave for Undone in a few days' time.'

Ralph, feeling a sense of faintness overcoming him, was speechless; he now leant against the trunk of a tree until they rose to return home.

Chapter XXI.

'You are a lover; borrow Cupid's wings,
And soar with them above a common bound.'
SHAKESPEARE.

'Put your feet up,' said the Viscount, as he led Ralph to the lower drawing-room at the Castle, and seated him gently upon the sofa. Macjoy was soon by his side, and none too soon—in another minute he had fainted.

'He has walked too far,' was Macjoy's remark, as he forced a little brandy down his throat and ordered him some substantial refreshment. In a short time he had come to, and was laughing at his weakness, but he looked pale and worn.

'Why did you not take to the pony?' asked Macjoy.

'I never thought of it,' was Ralph's reply.

'Ah, just like you men!'

'It was all my fault,' said the Viscount at once. 'Ralph, my boy, peg into the grub. I'm really very sorry; the ladies are dressing for dinner; here, drink this—so! you stand excused, you know. How are you now, old man?'

'Sublime!' was his dreamy response, but he looked ridiculous. Ralph was soon sleeping the sleep of the tired—for it was a delicious sofa, made for weary limbs. Save the faint sighing of the summer evening breeze, and the ticking of a quiet, well-bred clock under a glass, which made the silence more perceptible, not a sound could now be heard. Ralph slept long past the dinner-hour. No barbarous gong gave tongue, even the great Castle-bell was hushed, for Macjoy had given strictest injunctions, 'Never wake him suddenly.'

After a while he woke and moved. Some fair, gentle hand had covered him with shawls—soft and lady-like in texture, not like men's rough plaids. He felt a tassel on a tiny cloak—'twas blue, his favourite colour. A monogram of the letters B.V.P. was worked upon it.

He breathes, 'She is at home, then!'

Voices are talking low and earnestly. His frame begins to tremble, for he has heard that voice before—when—where?—he cannot call to mind. He presses the tassel fondly to his lips and listens. 'Be calm, my soul!' he breathes. 'Still, still, this beating heart! it is the same! What is there in a voice to make me tremble so? what mystery—' He hears a rustling close beside him, and then a small white hand is placed upon his brow.

He starts; there stands the lovely Marchioness looking her gentle acknowledgment of gratitude.

'I fear my daughters have disturbed you,' she whispers in his ear; 'but now you must forget there are such persons in the room as ourselves.'

'Forget!' thinks he—'forget!' He tries to speak; she then leans low again; he feels her breath upon his brow. His frame trembles and his face flushes while she speaks in subdued and silvery accents, 'You noble boy!' and then the falling tear revealed her love. 'A mother's prayers surround you every hour! ay, follow you through life! May blessings from a watchful Heaven when far, far from—' She stopped. He pressed her hand to his warm lips—he tried to murmur forth, 'Say, say no more!' He saw her first-born son in every look, and felt her mother's heart yearning towards him—the boy who dared so brave, so rash a deed!

Amid the silence, she with her tiny hands smoothed the matted heavy locks from off his forehead and let them fall around.

'Does sickness always change like this?' thinks he, as he met the gaze of those soft, lustrous eyes; for he, who thought nothing could ever weaken the force of those iron nerves, or impair the elasticity of frame for which from a boy he was conspicuous, was changed! 'How beautiful she is! and—I hardly feel courage to look at her!—ah! I am changed!' He had not seen the other occupants of the room when the Viscount appeared.

'Come along, Ralph, you must be half famished; we left you fast asleep; come and feed. No, another time,' said he to the men who crowded round to congratulate him.

'Othborne!' interposed the unconscious Freddy, as Ralph strained one glance across the room, 'do knock off your tholitary wayth; we do want you tho, don't we, Lady Beatriththe?'

The Viscount having hurried Ralph off to the dining-room, blushes were, if not spared, unnoticed. Stanley accompanied them, saying, 'Lady Beatrithe tho wanth to know when you will be all therene again—I know thhe doeth.'

Ralph retired early, but could not sleep; he kept on repeating however, 'They must have been her neck and shoulders!'

Presently the door opened. 'Farewell,' said his friend Macjoy. 'I start to-morrow early.'

'No—wait till Monday,' urged Ralph.

'I cannot possibly,' replied he; and giving him a few directions, they parted with regret, which was shared by all the household. with whom the young Doctor had become a favourite.

Ralph tried to sleep, but the dismal consciousness of his posi-

tion rushed upon him; all his losses stared him in the face, and this, added to the Viscount's revelations, effectually drove sleep from his eyes.

'I curse the Vortex!' he said over and over. 'I curse them all—Brokers—Jobbers—Parasites—Spoilers—all! What a dreary blank they've made of life for me!' He turned uneasily on his bed of pain. 'What sounds are these?' he asked himself, as he listened with rapt emotion to unearthly cadences, which reverberating through the vast old hall kept his excited brain in tension far into midnight. 'Who will close that door?' he sighed. 'She little thinks I'm listening! 'Tis sleep I want—not music!' Again he hears a voice, accompanied by a harp, and now he listens to each word intently and with an indefinable emotion.

(*forte*) 'No one is so accursed by fate,
No one so utterly desolate,
(*dim.*) But some heart, though unknown,
Responds unto his own—
Responds, as if with unseen wings
(*cres.*) An angel touched its quiv'ring strings,
(*dim.*) And whispered in its song,
(*piano*) "Where hast thou stayed so long?"'

Amid a rapturous applause he hears the faint rustle of a dress; one soft 'good-night' reëchoed in the hall; and now the memory of another night comes rushing o'er him, when an ethereal voice had raised its song to heaven, and heaven had seemed to hear its prayer.

Though not intended for his ear, each word was fixed in deepest memory. Mingled with others, he had heard that voice again, and yet had not seen its owner.

'Ah, Beatrice!' the wild youth sobbed, 'child of my heart! fair Beatrice, sing, ah, sing no more! One short week and I am gone! spare, sweet Beatrice—cease, oh cease!'

Chapter XXII.

'We are not worst at once; the course of evil
Begins so slowly and from such slight source,
An infant's hand might stem its breach with clay.
But let the stream get deeper, and philosophy—
Ay, and religion too—shall strive in vain
To turn the headlong current.'—*Old Play.*

Right joyously did sunbeams dart through lattice windows, and merrily did birds of song bid welcome to the Sabbath morn.

'Twas twelve o'clock, and yet Ralph Osborne stirred not. The early church was o'er.

'Mother, is that Ralph's room?' he heard a tiny voice inquire. He opened his door, and there were all the villagers assembled in the hall to tenderly inquire, 'How is dear Ralph?'

While he was speaking to first one and then another he saw the Marquis approaching arm-in-arm with Raskall Clencher. Ralph had not so far had the honour of Raskall's acquaintance. Telegram after telegram had arrived for Walter, however, from the city, but he had been occupied with the Marquis away from the Castle; hence the present apparition.

The Marquis, advancing, embraced the boy, but was quite unable to utter words. One little struggling voice was heard to whisper, 'Is that Ralph?' while Ralph tried to say, 'My dear, kind friends, my heart's too full to thank you as I would.' The Marchioness led him gently away, and turning to her people said, 'My thanks are his; we all rejoice,' amid a murmur of affectionate applause. Clencher stood watching while the Marquis bade Ralph welcome to Trememdon. Raskall retired as he proceeded, 'The tidings of your courage and devotion are talked of everywhere. Happy the father who possesses such a son, and happy he who makes of such a man a friend!'

At the early dinner in the great hall, to which the villagers were invited, Harry Somers sat with knitted brow. She had smiled but once on him, and of that he was not quite sure. He began to look fierce and to mutter ominously. Until now this Bungaland young soldier had never experienced even a ruffle come across his hitherto unsusceptible bosom. This, his first pure love, had stirred the depths of his wild, fiery nature, and had transformed in a moment what had hitherto been callous and indifferent into a glowing furnace of devotion. Having never in his life 'dreamed' of such an one, he now adored with all the more honest depth and fidelity.

'Dear little Freddy,' as the young ladies called Stanley, never took a mouthful without casting languishing eyes towards his goddess; he was her devoted slave. Oswald Slasher sat now by her side; he had escorted her in every expedition, gathered hay-scented ferns, or the rarer *Asplenium maretinum*, from inaccessible nooks; at times falling a dozen clear feet, and gathering himself together like a ball, was ready the next moment to do her slightest bidding. He turned over her music as she sat at her harp or piano, and watched those fairy fingers as they travelled along the wires or notes, with depth of tenderness depicted

in his manly countenance, until she scarce could play, and had to beg him to sit down, or go further off.

Ralph, in a state bordering on bewilderment, sat beside Lady Eleanor, and when she called him 'her dear brother,' he meeting her soft, winning, though dignified gaze the while, scarce knowing what reply to make, she kindly took compassion on him, saying,

'Another time, Ralph: don't talk now; your doctor says you're to eat as much as you can!'

Ralph laughed and said, 'It's nothing at all. I'm all right.'

'It's true though,' she suddenly and earnestly exclaimed, 'for while I know you saved—a brother, I feel I have gained another!'

Ralph gazed at her through fast-gathering tears; she said no more, and then he tried to look up the long table. The little three-days-old was radiant, but he could not see her; she sat upon his side of the table, between Lord Allan Playfair, with whom she was an immense favourite, and the young dragoon.

Raskall Clencher sat where he obtained a good view of Ralph and Lady Beatrice, and keenly watched the changing countenances of each. Walter was by his side; the two appeared to be engaged in earnest conversation. Raskall observed the furtive glances Walter was casting towards the Marquis's youngest daughter; divining how matters stood, he treasured his observations for future use, and was coolly engaged making his calculations accordingly while most of the others were strolling in the park. He was surprised by Stanley, who, loitering behind, asked him,

'What'th the matter in the Thity that you have come up potthhathte for Mackthwell?'

'Only a trip, I assure you. Bluffshire's a beautiful county Mr. Stanley.'

'Beautiful,' dryly remarked Fred.

'Beautiful girls, too,' added Raskall gaily.

'What the devil thould you know about the girlth?' retorted Freddy, turning away, his thoughts probably clustering round his goddess.

Chapter XXIII.

'Her pretty feet, like snails, did creep
A little out, and then,
As if they played at bo-peep,
Did draw them in again.'—R. Herrick.

'Her lips were red, and one was thin
Compared to that was next her chin;
Some bee had stung it newly.
But, Dick, her eyes so guard her face,
I durst no more upon them gaze
Than on the sun in July.'—Sir John Suckling.

Captain Slasher having claimed the privilege of a walk with Ralph till five-o'clock tea, the young ladies sauntered about with Somers and Stanley. Walter never left the Marquis. Clencher, Tappem, and Sir Watt conversed together, while the Rev. Biorlmenes Getorl, M.A., sighed for 'goody' books, his style of that article being absent at the Castle.

Old Trememdon church was in the centre of the little village. Immediately after tea the pony-carriage came round to the hall door; the Viscount was going to drive Ralph there, while the party walked, a distance of over two miles.

Lady Beatrice was going to ride along with him. She had an uncommonly warm little heart of her own, and as old Betty Nairn could not come up with the villagers in the morning—having tried and broken down—the Marquis's youngest daughter was going to take her some of the good things she had missed. She lived near the shore, a mile beyond the church; her son was the tall, handsome, weather-beaten coast-guardsman who had directed the rocket apparatus.

And all the way along the two sat in the pony-carriage, never once looking at each other; they sat upon the same little seat because they were obliged to. I am half inclined to believe that even you could not have stood that, Mr. Bull—and—Ralph Osborne!

'Get in, Birdie, love,' Reginald had said; and, therefore, Ralph knew it *was* Birdie.

Ralph did try to look, and failed; he tried to look again, and got as high as the prettiest of little tiny mouths, and then—he felt so queer, queerer than ever; and she felt queer too; and there they were, and they had it all to themselves, for the Viscount's thoughts were far away.

I once thought I would leave them alone and not tell you a word about it; it overcomes me quite, even now, to think about

it, they were so spoony; they never once looked at each other all the way along. All at once it dawned upon Ralph that it *was* Lady Alfred Playfair's mouth; and then he thought he would like to grow bold and say something—but what?—and his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth. The little maiden suddenly started, for he was rash enough to think of offering to carry her parcel of goodies, and not yet being used to his broken arm, found he could do no such thing; after which they both got more shy than ever, and she looked away up at the rooks, and he straight before him, counting the buttons on the cushions, wondering how they managed to sew them down so neatly—he couldn't—and wishing he was in the shop where they did it, for a few minutes, wouldn't he bathe his face in cold water!

And this might have gone on for ever, oh, horrid! But Reginald pulled up at old Betty's, and giving the reins to a boy, went into the village to call on a tenant of his father's. What a relief this was, for there she was, and there was he! And he opened his eyes wide for the first time now, yet he couldn't speak; and he called himself a fool when he saw a tall, handsome village youth talking away quite freely to her, his face lit up with animation, while hers was turned away. How he envied that boy!

And when she chatted with Betty in such a merry, playful way he wondered how he could have been so stupid all along, and vowed he would be different in going back. But lo, the fairy now had turned. Quick as thought she was by the carriage side. Would he be bold? could he? how? She has now accepted Ralph's proffered hand; he holds it tremblingly as long as he dares, and when at last he lets it go, he cannot, for the life of him, remember how it felt, or anything about it. And yet the little hand had long lain warmly clasped in his broad palm. One thing alone he knows; he feels her full, resistless, joyous glance, and experiences a thrill of delight as the wee-est little foot is exposed to view for an instant on the carriage step. How reverentially he places her beside him, and as the two recline upon the carriage back, he feels it vibrate with every pulsation of her little bosom! They are now returning silent gaze for gaze—his soul and hers seem blending into one, while the Lady Alfred of his dreams is nestling by his side.

Chapter XXIV.

'Howe'er it be, it seems to me
'Tis only noble to be good ;
Kind hearts are more than coronets,
And simple faith than Norman blood.'—Tennyson.

Now Ralph Osborne loved Lady Beatrice, for although he had not spoken one word to her, he drunk in deep draughts of love. She was so near to him, he felt her warmth. As she reclined he looked at her, and said within himself, 'Ah, what a colour 'tis!' for she appeared radiant with hues of more than heavenly beauty. And Lady Beatrice seemed unconscious. Ralph mused, 'Her eyes dark violet-blue, dark and sweeping are her eyelashes, golden brown hair, pencilled her eyebrows, and pale marble forehead.'

Her bright flush ebbed and flowed—it ebbed no more—a blush of deepest crimson settled on her cheek. Ralph gazed and breathed—nay, scarce did breathe; his soul sighed forth the words, 'Ah, thus to live, and thus to die!'

(I breathed,

'What! in a pony-carriage, and leaning back like babes; two babes not introduced, each looking shy and red!—to live like that, and so to die?')

He heeded not, but half aside gazed into deep-violet eyes. Their quick, unnatural brightness almost startled him, yet he drew not his own away.

'What is it plays around those tell-tale lips?' he mutters. 'Such tremulous emotion ne'er deceives. These, vain of control, proclaim or stamp against our very will!'

'Good-bye, dear old Betty.'

Ralph felt he heard a tremor in her voice; and while the poor old creature invoked a blessing on 'God's own flower—the rose of Old Trememdon'—she'd known her from a wee thing, she always was her 'own pet flower,' and must be to the end—Ralph urged the Viscount.

'Drive on, please, Reginald,' he said.

'God bless you, sir,' he faintly heard.

'And you, too, dear old soul!' he cried.

'Take care—oh, guard Trememdon's flower!' was wafted, in trembling accents, on the summer air. Ralph vowed to God he would. (I breathed,

'But, Ralph! you hold her hand too long.')

I heard him sigh, 'Ah, let it thus remain one moment more!

thus, thus to dream both lives away! Ah, thus to die, 'twere rapture!'

'Ralph, you're gone mad!' (I breathed.) 'You have not known the child an hour!'

He heeded not.

Chapter XXV.

'His nature is too noble for the world:
He would not flatter Neptune for his trident
Or Jove for his power to thunder.'—Shakespeare.

The Old Trememdon ponies jogged quietly along at their own pace, and the three were late at church. Not wishing to disturb the congregation, they sat near the door. When the family were at the Castle, Lady Eleanor played the organ; its tones were sweet, and the responses of the congregation hearty and earnest.

Sometimes Lord Allan Playfair had an unusual manner with him. After telling the congregation where the text was to be found, he would say, in a quiet kind of way, 'He said,' and then proceed. There was something in the views enunciated, and in the manner of the preacher's handling the subject that Sabbath night, which appeared so remarkably appropriate, that Ralph found himself able, after reaching the Castle, to delineate, word for word, many of the expressions used, and the general tenour of the remarks.

'Some people there are who have a habit of thinking that losing one's soul is an event which can only take place in another world,' said he; 'that it is confined to it, and has nothing whatever to do with the states of being, or the circumstances attending this; in other words, they regard the soul as an ethereal essence, separate from, and independent of, all connection with mundane affairs, and uninfluenced by conduct and actions here. They think that either by observing certain courses, following certain practices, attending to certain ceremonies, or coinciding with certain beliefs, they are taking measures to assure to themselves, by some mystic, inexplicable, and peculiar process, that "salvation," and that happiness in a future state, which, by ignoring and setting at defiance the first rules of morality—the plainest precepts of our holy religion—they are failing to secure in this!

'Never, my friends, was there a greater delusion! Unfaithful should I be were I to allow this opportunity to pass without enforcing upon your attention the true state of the case, as it is clearly laid down in the passage under our consideration: "What

shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

'Figuratively, then, he may "gain the whole world." He may amass riches, he may heap up splendours, he may build palaces, he may possess countless treasures—houses, lands, ships, mines—but he may, during the process of accumulation—mark! not shall lose it, or very nearly lose it, but lose it—here—now; be losing it every day he's at the Mart, in the warehouse, at the factory, in the mine, in his office, at the Exchange!

'He fails to be honest; he commences to lose his soul. He makes a false statement regarding some matter of honour or trust; he has begun to lose his soul. He combines with others to secure the success of a scheme which he has reason to believe can prove a success to its promoters alone, and must entail ruin on its dupes; he has gone far, far indeed, towards losing his soul! for from that hour he loses his self-respect, and that is his soul; he has tarnished his honour, and his being, his soul, his essence, is no longer the bright, the pure existence it was intended to be; he is already travelling on "the downward slope to death"—death to hope, to joy, to happiness!

'And now it passes through that state we call—Death! and will any one here to-night venture to tell me that any quantity of outward observances, however rigorously performed, or of any sort of faith whatever, will change the state of that soul when it awakes hereafter?

'Cankered with the lust of gold, corroded by collusion's guile, polluted by acts of moral turpitude, is it not given over to a state which is only translated to another, wherever that other sphere may be?

'Not from the wrath of Offended Majesty would such an one now flee! His own reflections overwhelm him with confusion! His possessions!—where are they now? Not one solitary gleam of hope, nor ray of consolation, can they afford him!

'Widowed hearts rise up on every side; for he has broken them! He stands confronted by myraids of children and orphans whom he has despoiled, and who accuse him of having caused them untold sufferings here; while sons and daughters upbraid him with having led them on to ruin!

'What now can hide the hideous deformity of his soul? No earthly greatness will shield or protect him there!

'Well may such a man, at such a time, call, in his despair, upon the mountains to fall upon him, and the hills to cover him! He may, before he departed hence, have willed vast sums to Charity—and her blest influence "covereth a multitude of sins"

—or he may, while here, have laid out fortunes in beautifying neighbourhoods formerly polluted with crime, hoping, by the *éclat* attending such ostentatious acts, to divert public attention from the fact that such funds were the issue of Spoliation—the offspiring of Robbery! But no after acts of his can heal that father's broken heart! No after munificence can do aught to mitigate the bitter anguish of woes which he created, relieve sufferings he deliberately inflicted, or call to life the dead! The past is irrevocable, and is now followed by a still more dreadful retrospect. He unhesitatingly preferred, while here, to "gain the whole world, and lose his own soul." Devoutly, indeed, does he pray for instant annihilation—"Mountains, crush us; ye hills, obliterate us!" But his thoughts, his reflections, all press him hard; and, worse than all, he sees that gentle hand, upraised in silent agony, reproachful—ever! ever! nor can be fiercer hell! He would give all he once possessed to purchase extinction! Too late! Whole lives of misery and distress are mutely mocking—*his despair!*'

Chapter XXVI.

'Why should a man whose blood is warm within
Sit like his grandsire, cut in alabaster?'—Shakespeare.

The carriage had long arrived at the Castle; but Ralph slept far into the summer gloaming. When last in a conscious state, he found himself breathing secretly down in some hidden cavern of his heart, in accents low, tender, and broken, the name of Beatrice. Now, Ralph was a very spoony man, and if he hadn't soon woke up, I really must have left him, or I should never have got along.

'What's that?' I heard him say in tones of terror. I own he nearly startled me, he looked so wild. 'A voice!' he cried; 'who spoke?' he asked, and shivered. ''Twas in the hills, or far away—no, near! across yon wold! A dream? no, no, I'm sure I heard it.'

The burly form of Slasher now approached.

'A dream?—yet there it stays!' he cried again; 'it's ringing in my ears—I'll guard her!' he almost shrieked, and then saw Slasher.

It was nearly dark. Relieving him of a mass of wraps his friends had heaped upon him, the young dragoon remarked his wild, weird look, and grasped him by the hand.

'Why, Ralph, how cold you are! you'd just been dreaming I heard—'

'No, Slasher, no! I heard a voice.'

Slasher thought he saw through it all.

'Give us your paw, old boy, and come along; blow me if you're not cold! We never are to wake you, that's an adage, but this is beyond a joke, ha, ha!' He looked Ralph closely in the face, and then said, 'Why, what's up? been—oh, I see, cold evening after a hot day—affects me sometimes; dry 'em up, that's a good chap; women about—ha, ha!'

Ralph felt too stupid to say anything; but, hoping he had not been observed, walked fast to the dining-room, where he met Lady Gertrude, who, in the kindest of sweet voices, inquired after him, and expressed a hope that his appetite was as good as his patience.

Chapter XXVII.

'There's nought, no doubt, so much the spirit calms
As rum and true religion.'—Byron.

'Sermon do you call it? lecture on—on free-thinking and rationalism, rather,' said Hard-hand Tappem, Esq. M.P., the moment Ralph entered the drawing-room arm-in-arm with the Viscount. 'I call it unorthodox, unsound, and subversive of the proper relations between class and class, and man and man. What say you, Getorl?'

Being thus appealed to, the rubicund M.A. said he thought, with all due deference to their noble host, that, viewing the matter from a broad point of view, it would be quite as well if the clergy did not travel out of their sphere to attack 'class interests,' which, in the main, and on the whole, worked, he presumed, for the Old Countree's good.

'Well, you see,' joined in Sir Watt Scroughem, 'I don't say one thing—I don't say another. Maybe they do—maybe they do not. But there they are! working, and at work. Let everybody live, I say, and—take life as it comes. I meet my friend Maxwell' (Maxwell and Clencher here both grinned, and Sir Watt grinned back again); 'he says, "I've nothing but a mine on—Director means 500*l.* per ann., two-fifty shares given in, and your Name, Sir Watt, in exchange." Well, we don't fall out' (extra grins from the Parasites, which were cordially returned). 'Turns up trumps—I make a pile—if not, I can't lose—if anybody does, it's their look-out, not mine! And I'm no worse than others if

I thus let my name serve me, in spite of all we've heard to the contrary to-night !—ha, ha !'

'Exactly, Sir Watt,' chimed in the hard-visaged M.P.; 'and not only so, but it's flying in the face of an all-wise Providence to run down "existing institutions !" Then there's Class and Class, and Man and Man, and Landmarks and Stability, and Foundations of Society, and Sound Progress, and—and—'

Being very much out of breath, the M.P. stopped. Major Laysayfairean having remarked that he thought that such things were always much better left to take their chance; and Colonel Groovite having informed the company, that he thought any great sweeping change in that respect might be productive of disastrous consequences upon 'Society,' Ralph, being forbidden to excite himself, first bit his lips, then his fingers, and finally did nothing else.

Freddy was by *her* side, and was, he afterwards confessed, 'tho happy !'

The scar upon the brow of the Bungaland young soldier glowed whiter than ever. It looked portentous; and as he sat behind Lady Beatrice, adoring her, and envying others by turns, she avoided Harry's gaze, for it appeared to bode no good to any one.

Ralph gazed intently at Slasher, and his warm blood ran cold as he heard that voice come o'er the wolds again.

(I breathed, and—oh, joy ! he was now susceptible to Spectral life:

'Forget it—try !')

'It comes again !' he muttered. 'Ah, look at her ! Hush ! ah, me—ah, me !'

(I breathed:

'But Slasher is good and true; and honest are the others !')

'Look, look !' I heard him whisper, 'all her rich, lovely colour now has faded ! Her dark, pencilled eyebrows stand out in bewitching contrast to her noble brow ! Ah, child of Nature ! too beautiful art thou ! My God ! too beautiful ? Oh, guard her, then ! See, those lips now quiver ! Ah, why so silent, and I so sad ?'

* * * * * * *

'I presume, Captain Slasher, you won't object to my seeing it too,' said the Marquis to him, as he was in the act of passing a slip of paper to his youngest daughter. The young dragoon became scarlet.

'Let me read it, papa,' said Beatrice, coming gaily to the rescue. All eyes were turned upon her. '"The finest fellow out, by Jove !"—I can't—I cannot read—oh, yes !—"whether high, or low,

or broad, or round!"—that's all, papa. Oh, no!—"as true as I love,"—oh, I can't read this, papa!—oh, "Smoking," I think it is, papa.' Her sweet, ringing voice was such music to the youngsters' ears, that each worshipped her more reverentially than ever; and as to Ralph, his misery seemed complete.

The Marquis now took the paper from her hand, she reddening like the full-blown rose. Adjusting his eye-glass, he said in a very merry tone, 'Well, Birdie darling, I never saw "smoking" begin with a *B* before, my child!'

Looking more bewitching than ever in that roseate hue, she made a second essay, prompted by the ingenious Slasher.

'No, but—*Baccy* does, papa!'

A roar of laughter followed this remark.

'What, my child?' asked the Marquis dubiously.

'Why,' she said, pouting her lips deliciously, and leaning her dainty little form so provokingly over Freddy's head and shoulders, that the poor lad's state became, from that moment, quite hopeless, 'why, you know' (she had had a peep at the paper), 'Bac—B—' and stopped.

'*Beatrice* does, my dear; Baccy or Bacca, or whatever Captain Slasher is putting you up to, does not at all resemble this word after the first letter,' said the old Marquis, quietly returning the paper. She bore the laughter which followed these words very complacently, and joining in herself, looked radiant with a settled glow lighting up those wondrous features.

The Marquis, growing merry over it, called upon Captain Slasher to favour the company with the views he had intended to convey to his little rogue of a daughter. Cries of 'Captain Slasher! Slasher! Blazes Slasher!' being loud and unanimous, the young dragoon officer rose.

After informing them that he, in a general way, was unaccustomed to that sort of thing, he dilated upon the virtues of the noble Marquis, the charms of the lovely Marchioness; then last, but certainly not least, he said, 'The imcomparably fair and lovely daughters of the noble and honoured race of Trememdon' (loud and universal applause, mingled with blushes). 'But I must not enlarge upon this topic, or I might find myself, ere long, in a raving state' (loud laughter). He sat down, but, at the earnest request of the Marquis, rose again, and continued, 'As for myself, I, Blazes Slasher as I am called, greatly admire the estimable—the jolly Rector; and if I did not, I shouldn't say so' (cheers). 'In short, I feel proud and happy in indorsing every word I have committed to paper—every word' (laughter from Ralph, cheers from Freddy, a Satanic grin from Raskall, and *movement* from Somers,

who was getting hot and excited; while blushes were again and again renewed in a certain quarter).

'The Rev. the Rector certainly is,' continued he, 'in my humble estimation, the finest fellow out, or one of them, and I don't care who thinks to the contrary,' said he, looking defiantly and calmly round the room. 'I do not want to quarrel with anybody; but if there is one thing more than another that would make me, and I'm not a quarrelsome man, it is that sort of thing, you know—robbing those widows and orphans, and all that sort of thing, you know. I hope to live and die at peace with all men; but if anybody wants to have a row, especially over widows and orphans, and that sort of thing, why—I am their man, at any time, place, or manner, at their convenience. I believe there is a great deal too much of that sort of thing going on, and, on the whole, I wish it were not so.

'I will conclude this infamously wretched speech' ('No, no—go on, Slasher!') 'by proposing the healths of our noble host and hostess, and their charming family, embracing with them that of the Rev. the Rector of Trememdon, Lord Allan Trevosa Playfair, and I call upon you all to join.'

While this was being done, and before the salvoes of cheering which accompanied the speech had ceased, the Marquis rose, and took Slasher warmly by the hand. A general shaking of hands following, both with the Marquis and with Slasher, it became infectious. Up came the Rev. Biorlmenes Getorl, M.A., who warmly embraced Slasher for defending 'the cloth,' while he and Hard-hand Tappem, Esq. M.P., became equally affectionate. 'Sound views—sound views!' ejaculated the latter, in no dubious tone, 'very sound views!' said he, to the great surprise of all. Whose were sound, however, seemed problematical.

'Everybody is right—just what might have been foreseen, sir!' exclaimed Sir Watt. The wine passed more freely, and the party grew more merry.

Stanley lisped in his goddess's ear, 'Wathn't it a thublimely thentimental thpeetth—hith firtht too, Lady Beatrithe?' She rewarded him with a smile, which pierced Somers through.

'What's the hubbub all about?' inquired Slasher of Ralph, as the two stood by her side. Ralph first regarded him, then watched the towering form of Harry Somers as he sentinellised the ground; he gazed too upon the youthful Stanley, lisping his soul away into those lovely ears, and noted her wondrous look.

Again he looks at the stalwart dragoon—in one instant more their eyes have met, their arms have intertwined in the presence of, and side by side with, all that was dearest in life to both.

'He shall have her, for he is worthy and he is rich, while I—'

Poor Ralph's excited brain could no further go; while 'She loves him; I'll stand by them both!' was generous Slasher's stout resolve.

And she, alone of all around divining the nature of the scene moved quietly away.

Slasher heard Ralph mutter, 'Lovely flower! oh, dainty form! no longer sounds that voice; come weal, come woe, I'll guard you!' and nearly every word was echoed in the other's breast.

Maxwell, the Viscount, and Raskall Clencher had been conversing together at the extreme end of the room. Ralph, glancing across, now said aloud, 'But, Walter!—why, what is the man looking at?—my brother!—at her! oh, God!'

He leaned for support upon the upright form of Slasher. There it was!—that old, weird, sinister expression—that fatal look which used to play around those high cheek-bones and make Ralph shudder. It made him shudder now, as rushing on his memory, back from boyhood, it seemed more hideous and more intense than ever!

'Tis nothing, Reginald; I only thought I heard a voice!'

A brave, strong form supported him, nor asked him why Both men regarded each other for a moment, then looked at Ralph. Stanley left Harry's side and walked across to Maxwell.

'Why, Macthwell, have you got fathe-ache or neuralthia?' he asked, in real simplicity. Walter's countenance instantly relaxed.

Ralph seemed greatly agitated, and spoke in jerky sentences. 'You did not hear a voice then, just behind—no here—well, all around, across from yonder hills. But p'raps 'twas all a fancy How weak I feel to-night—how—'

'No, no,' both said at once; 'no, not at all.'

'I often feel like that myself,' said thoughtful, generous Oswald.

Had Slasher heard that voice he would have soon demanded the reason why, but Ralph was tired and worn.

During the whole of this little scene one pair of eyes seemed ever watchful. Raskall Clencher allowed nothing to escape his keen observation.

Part the Third

Chapter I.

'By day or night, in weal or woe,
That heart, no longer free,
Must bear the love it cannot show,
And, silent, ache for thee.'—Byron.

It was towards the end of an autumn day as the Viscount—whose leave of absence had been considerably extended — and Ralph were returning from cub-hunting, that the latter intimated his intention of taking his departure from a spot which was pregnant with the most momentous events of his life.

The Marquis had long returned from town. Slasher and his companions had taken their departure. 'Ta-ta,' had said the young dragoon to his friend, 'ta-ta, old forlorn; give us your paw, only one—fortune of war, you know, ha, ha! To-day's sixth, twelfth begins; guns to look up—tradesmen to "hum," governor to write to—bad specs, Undone Vortex, ha, ha! Lucky rascal, jolly girls—soon be back!' and he was off to the moors.

'The girls will be home in a week, so don't run away yet,' urged Reginald. Yet for that reason Ralph packed his traps that night in an 'I'll-suff'rish' kind of way. The Marchioness had from the first seen how it would all be; for whenever Lord Alfred had expatiated in glowing terms upon his friend's merits, Lady Beatrice would change colour and start, and she had observed her constantly gazing upon his portrait, which hung in her boudoir. Ralph was too ill to travel, thought she; and so she had packed Lady Beatrice and her sister Gertrude off on a visit into Loveshire.

'But you will never go before my ball!' remonstrated Lady Eleanor, who was to come of age in October.

'No; Ralph wouldn't think of such a thing,' said the Viscount. And yet Ralph packed; and he mused while doing so.

'They don't know I love her, but the Marchioness does, and honours me for my resolution. Oh, love! how thou hast changed me! She loves me,—and as for me, I cannot say what *I* feel! I once thought I would fly from her in one short week, but now, how changed I feel! Ah, that Vortex! But I will achieve, for she is mine!'

Ralph was no more in possession of the idol of his heart than

he was of those unromantic essentials, 'means,' wherewith to keep such a little pet in elegance. True, she had never given a thought to such vulgar considerations; she would not have been Birdie if she had—very childish, but there it was. 'Is money' (the want of it, he meant) 'going to separate us? why, we love each other!' said Ralph, when his portmanteau was ready.

'Come and see the Ancient Court; we overlook it from the east wing,' said Lady Eleanor to him; 'that is where my ball will take place. It will be covered with an immense marquee, and when the whole is complete the interior will form a grand saloon, with corridors and ante-rooms. It will resemble fairy-land when lighted up, what with the living shrubs, and many more that the gardeners will introduce.'

It was in her sweet society that the poor boy had beguiled most of his evenings, and they had soared aloft together in the rich realms of fancy, and of exquisite, subtle delight, drawn to the confines of a world hitherto but little known, though often sighed for by him.

'You tempt me so, Eleanor, but I fear—business—'

'Business, Ralph! pooh! Come, now, I know you will not refuse me!' said she gaily.

And because she was a goddess in her own right, and was queenly, and was like Reginald, whom Ralph thought god-like, and because she said, and he thought, it would be 'So nice,' he consented to stay, and to—oh, the very thought sent the hot blood coursing through his veins—dance with Lady Beatrice!

'And whispering "I'll ne'er consent," consented.'—BYRON.

Whether Ralph retired that night a happy, a satisfied, because a scrupulously right-minded fellow, entitled to the high opinion of his fair companion, who had so often called him her frank, good brother; whether, if he had told Eleanor the truth, she would have cherished him all the more, even if it had ended in his leaving Trememdon with a thousand honourable regrets, were questions which did not, I am inclined to think, weigh very much with Ralph just then.

The Marchioness was put out of court, for she was alone; as the Marquis's thoughts, she had observed with an indescribable sense of anguish and alarm, were always absent now.

Her opinion of Ralph was so high and her affection for him so great that she would do nothing to wound the feelings of one whom she would gladly have welcomed as a son, provided there had been other foundations to justify his fondness for her little daughter than merely romantic attachment, however devoted.

Chapter II.

'They sin who tell us love can die.
With life all other passions fly;
All others are but vanity.'—Southey.

Those 'Old Trememdon pets' were the shaggiest, their paces the fastest, and their forms the prettiest in all the county round.

'The girls' had returned, sunburnt and plump, stout and merry.

'It was all the bathing and Loveshire cream, wasn't it, Sissy?' asked Beatrice.

'Oh, darling Birdie! but didn't donkey-riding and junket help?' said Gertrude.

'And we have been *si abandonnées*, and not at all proper!' sighed Birdie. And Ralph sighed too, and felt relieved, and wished he had been there; and then they all three laughed.

He noted the quick withdrawal of her hand, and stood gazing, waiting for a smile. And she knew it, and didn't keep him long, and with it came the faintest of colours; and Ralph was all in a tremble, and the poor little Marchioness turned away, and could not look any more that night.

And the 'girls' ascended the staircase winding round the grand old hall, Ralph following, he knew not how or whither, till he was at the top, when Lady Beatrice kissed her sister in such a tantalising kind of way, that he felt wretched, and looked miserable.

'Her lips!' he kept on muttering, long after they had parted for the night. And Birdie put her arms around Sissy's waist and squeezed her, and laughed; and Ralph heard and stood listening.

'Oh, Sissy darling, how well he looks! I am so glad, ar'n't you?' and heard again those long-sustained caresses. And he hurried off to his end of the old Castle, and slept—did he? if so, the sleep of the incurably spooney—and dreamed of her, that she eluded his grasp whenever he tried to catch her; it was of no use, although she covered him with fairy garlands, till he was smothered. At last he caught her and woke, and heard Carlo barking, and then looked out. She was frisking and frollicking with him in the garden.

The gallops across country, sometimes with Reginald, sometimes alone together, and the fun they had over getting ferns, many of which were too high to reach without wondrous con-

trivances, are matters of well-authenticated history. Ralph was told to be careful, and he was not careful, but slipped, and a little scream was heard; both advancing to help him, Gertrude first, but somehow Birdie always came to the front just in time—her hand being ungloved, while Gertrude's was not—but she was soon back again with her sister. Now they returned. Distant laughter was heard in the direction of the Castle. Bright eyes sparkled, and Gertrude stood upon the front seat of the carriage. Beatrice, trying to join her, slipt and fell, snapping the reins like threads against the support. All would have been well, had the girls been quiet, but they were in high spirits. The more Ralph implored them, the less heed did they pay. The ponies had begun to bolt, and the girls got frightened. Nearing a slight ascent Ralph prepared to alight and get hold of their heads. Seeing his intention, Lady Beatrice shrieked, 'No, don't, Ralph!' and clutched his arm. On went the affrighted ponies, up one hill and down another at a tearing pace. All was now consternation. They approached a bend; a bridge had to be crossed, and a felled tree lay alongside it. Ralph, dreading the worst, pushed the affrighted girls low into the body of the carriage. Crouched down there they awaited their fate.

Lady Beatrice, blanched and speechless, held on to his arm with both her hands. Ralph, seeing her helpless condition, now took her in his arms and whispered in her ear, Lady Gertrude clinging to him. Just before the turn was passed Ralph raised his head to look around. The terrified girl in his arms, fearing he was about to leap out, screamed hysterically, 'Do not leave me! oh, don't!' He strained her to his bosom, unable to utter a word, while she, almost unconscious, reposed her head upon his shoulder. Her scream had startled the ponies. She was silent now, but the pace had again become terrific. Ralph gasped, 'You are driving the ponies wild!'

'Then stay with me!' she implored, and looked up in his face.

'My child, my child, my own! I'll never leave you!'

Straining her madly to him, grasping Gertrude's hand, he screamed convulsively, 'Hold tight!'

A wilder, closer pressure, with Gertrude's arms flung unconsciously around the two, her head reclining against his own, they waited the shock. It was over in a moment. I see them even at this distance of time, Gertrude unhurt, Ralph but slightly bruised; but the darling upon his bosom, ah, where was she?

Chapter III.

'For aught that ever I could read
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth.'
SHAKESPEARE.

And Ralph knew that the flower of Old Trememdon was very ill indeed, the Marchioness having told him so. He, poor boy, had raised her up from that greensward on which he found her; had gazed into that face which had turned the current of his life to brightness and to bounding hope, now changed to death-like pallor; had borne his lovely burden to the brook close by, and bathing her temples, felt her tiny pulse.

'Thank God, it beats!' cried he. She moaned, it was music to his longing ear. And while he bedewed her brow and palms with water from the limpid spring she sighed. He murmured in her ear, 'My child, oh, waken! say you are not hurt! my own child, Beatrice!' But silently she lay; he raised the loved one gently on his knee and gave a cordial from his hunting-flask. 'Speak, speak!' he now implored, 'your Ralph is by your side! Oh, breathe again that sigh!' Her lifeless form lay still. 'Ah, woe is me!' he cried. Forcing himself to calmness, he said to Gertrude, who, bending low, was weeping bitterly, 'Quick! take the loved one's head, and I'll away!'

Pressing one fervent kiss upon her cold, moist brow—that brow so pale and clear—he tore himself straight for Trememdon's Castle. Turning a bend, he spied, down in the long autumn grass, the luckless ponies.

The Castle yet was full two miles away.

'Ho, Trot! hey, Toby! What's pretty boy about?' They started. Each moment seemed a life.

(I breathed: 'Oh, haste, nor waste a moment more!')

He is kneeling on the grass—he gazes once towards the brook. He whispers, 'My pretty boys!' They hang their guilty heads, nor started more. 'Come—so, my little boys, so—so!' They browse from off the hanging trees; they fetch one long deep sigh—they're mastered. 'Trot, Toby, boys! now come.'

He holds his hand, one moves, and he advances cautiously; nor do they further stir till, quite bereft of harness by his swift hand, and one set free, the fleetest made his steed, he casts one look behind; then over, through, and by each brake and brae he gains the Castle.

'A Fernland settler catch a pair of well-trained ponies!' I heard him mutter in contempt.

'Quick! down to yonder brook; get out the carriage!' The Mountedgecumbes give him theirs; the brooklet's once more gained, to find she has not moved. He bears her tenderly, and puts her well inside, and with her sister's help applies his remedies, forcing good brandy down, mingled with drops of never-failing arnica. Joy! joy! she smiles, and smiles through falling tears. As yet he fears to speak, lest her reply should fail.

'Dear Gertrude! pour in this lotion, undo all that long hair!'

'Twas soon and well begun. She smiles no more, but heavier becomes. Each hand and arm he chafes—so nerveless and so cold! He presses to his lips those tiny hands lately so full of life and glee.

The Castle once more reached, he gains the stable door.

'Saddle the Sultan! My friend Macjoy will come.' He gains the village post, and 'wires'—'*Haste—haste to her!*'

The weirdness of that night! The poor old Marquis is well-nigh frantic over his favourite child. The Marchioness, in despair, now tells how fever and delirium rage. And Ralph prescribes mechanically, and keeps Pills Nostrum out with his vehement will.

He sleeps in an adjoining chamber, and gives his rules and simple remedies. That night all watch the fairest flower of Old Trememdon's race. The fever bates. Macjoy arrives.

'Well, Doctor, how's my patient?'

'Thank God, she's doing well. You equal me in skill. Couldn't be better. Please God, the child will soon be well.'

What days and nights of anxious, weary watching! The sixth—a week—the fever rages still!

A better time arrives; the fever lessens; the patient becomes more calm. Ralph seems again to breathe, nor yet will leave the room he chose so close to hers. The Sultan has no idle time—each hour is something wanted; the horse soon knows his purpose as eagerly he urges on his pathless way. Ralph tells the Marchioness, 'It's all I now can do—just to and from Trememdon village.' A mother's watchful eye takes note of all—a mother's ear is listening now to accents all too sad. Ah, how I pitied him, as day by day, at first with anxious face, and then with aspect of distraction wild, he asked Macjoy beseechingly to tell him all, or I would have breathed into his sorrowing ear, 'Oh, Ralph, why did you stay? A girl's young heart once given can never, never stray! And given like is hers!'

Night comes again; he paces quick that room so close to

hers. 'Will Gertrude be my friend?' But she is now forbid to tell of aught that passes in that chamber.

'And must I tell you all?' Macjoy asks kindly.

Ralph puts his hand upon his brow. 'Ah, why so ardent and so headstrong?' he thinks; 'and yet suspense will drive me mad! What can he mean? How can he smile so, when I am dying with agony and deepest love?'

He starts—he grasps his friend's warm hand, and cries with choking utterance, 'Macjoy! God help her!'

'Ah, Ralph, it is so!'

Ralph reflects, 'But can he know my thoughts?' He—straight from fever's chamber—who just now watched his patient's gestures, heard her frenzied words, her accents wild! Her maddened prayers are ringing in his ears! And yet Ralph asks,—he pauses, then thinks again. 'He must be—is my friend, and, too, is hers;' and straight from out his bursting heart he sobs, 'What have I done? Macjoy, I love her so!'

Chapter IV.

'In her first passion woman loves her lover.'—Byron.

They neither move nor speak—not in a whisper. 'Twould be profanity to utter words while two strong hearts are melting.

The silence now is awful, but soon—

'Ralph, Ralph! my own beloved Ralph! where art thou, Ralph? Why keep him from me? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Oh, Ra—'

Ralph stands transfixed. That voice! Then cries aloud, 'Great God! what sounds are these?'

He hears a rustling in the room; the door unfastens, then noiselessly it closes. The silence now seems of the grave; he hears another open, and then again.

'Ralph, Ralph! my darling boy! oh! whe—'

'Tis closed; he is alone!

One moment more, with hands uplift to Heaven in agonising prayer, he calls for 'Help, help, help!' and ever louder yet, in voice distinct and clear, he cries again for 'Help—for her!'

The room swims round. With hands upraised, he paces up and down, then listens. Suddenly he starts. 'Hark!' he sobs; 'was that?—the air seems vibrating! She speaks to me!' and then he cries aloud, 'My Father!—ours!'

* * * * * * *

And Lady Gertrude, passing, hears that boy's wild cry. There comes a silent tapping; his door is quickly opened. An angel's voice now says,

'Why, Ralph! poor dear Ralph!'

With fevered air he points to that chamber door, while Gertrude trembles, and yet her eyes betray a kind of exultation.

'She is sleeping now,' says Gertrude.

'Thank God!' he tries to utter. He pauses, but soon it all comes forth: 'I cannot leave her yet! Oh, Gertrude! not—not now!'

'Dear Ralph, oh no! Stay with us till she gets quite well—we all do want you so. Oh, Ralph, how good you are! Stay, there's a dear Ralph! She'll soon be better if you do, I know.'

The poor boy falls down at her feet, he holds her hands in his; pressing them to his lips he asks, 'How, how? Ah, say, there's a dear child, I'm longing so to know.' She hesitates. 'Sweet Gertrude, dear Gertrude! oh, say those words again, and tell me how you know!'

'Well, Ralph, she is not always like—'

'No, no—yes, yes! Well, Gertrude, well?'

'And once she told me so.'

'God bless her, then! God bless her darling heart! and you, dear Gertrude, tell Macjoy at once. Go, there's a dear, darling child—go!'

'He knows it, Ralph; you're not to go away, dear Ralph—I know you're not, there now. Good-night, dear Ralph.'

'No? Yes—stay, dearest Gertrude. Listen! ah, tell me more—now tell me that again.'

'No, not till you get up now, Ralph. You've been a penitent quite long enough—poor Ralph!' sobs forth the tender-hearted girl.

'Well, tell me it again!' implored the boy, now rising.

'Do you forget it, then, so soon? I would, were it to do you any good. Listen, Ralph: to-morrow—no more. Good-night, dear Ralph.'

She smiles through falling tears.

'To-morrow!—what? To-morrow—I—'

'Yes; to-morrow—you.'

'I—to—'

'Yes; you to!'

'To—to—to—see her?'

'Yes, dear Ralph! Good-night, dear Ralph; good-night good-night, *good-night!*'

Chapter V.

'He prayeth best who loveth best.'—Coleridge.

'Beatrice! Beatrice! Beatrice! Yes, Beatrice! Beatrice! Beatrice!' were all the words he uttered while standing at the half-closed door which Lady Gertrude had left some forty-five minutes before. He did not utter them, but breathed them, in the faintest, most controlled, yet fervent of whispers.

Ralph thought though. First he thought of his own pure, sweet little darling, and his warm heart throbbed and yearned, and he seemed borne along that moment on a deep, swelling torrent of pure affection. One vast Sense pervaded, overpowered, and embraced every other, till these in turn seemed lost and worthless, save as they served to fill that one. 'I always looked for her,' he said; 'and now, ah, now!'

'And once she told me so,' were the sole words which, ring ing in his ear, drove every other thought away. 'To-morrow—see her!'

Oh, 'twas all too grand!

'Ah, shall I ever get away?' I heard the wild youth say within himself. I saw his colour mount, as calling to mind how he had left Gertrude wishing him 'Good-night' over and over—he never answering a word—he hurried along the corridor to pour forth tears of gratitude. (I breathed:

'Quite needless, Ralph. The Lady Gertrude was half amused as well as interested in your distracted air.')

'Not to-night—to-morrow!' said Ralph. He lay his head upon his pillow. Did he who prayed so little forget that Heaven who in the moment of his direst woe had sent a sweet comforter in answer quick to agonising prayer? He prayed to Heaven then.

'How is it,' asked he of himself, 'when all is right and jogging just as I wish, I never think of praying? Is it unmanly? I never do it. Women pray, but then they're weaker. I rather like them for it; but for a man to kneel down night after night as women do seems so—I don't know what. I couldn't if I tried, and yet I'm not ashamed! I'd kneel in front of any market-place upon a market-day and pray for two good hours, or, tied to the stake, see the blazing fagots heaping around, if it would only do a bit of good, just like those chaps in olden times. How different we've become! Were they the better for it, are we the worse without? Yet, only let a great affliction

come, some dire distress, not on myself, but on the one I love, and straight to Heaven I waft my thought. My cry of anguish brings me face to face with great Immensity, Sublimity, Selp-Immolation! The noblest conceptions of Humanity, ay of Divinity, surround and urge me on to deeds of heroism which, but for that wondrous art of Invocation, would still be unperformed, yea unattempted lie!'

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Lady Gertrude loved her little sister, as did Lady Eleanor. They firmly believed that somehow all would be right in the end. Both had urged their mother in that sick-room, and thus at the very moment of Ralph's deepest grief all had been arranged.

Ralph was soon fast asleep, but not without a silent thought—vague, shadowy, and dreamy it is true, now that the intense excitement had subsided, but still a thought—to his Immensity, a reverential clinging around his then distant Entity, whose Wondrous Sublimity had at that moment greatly paled under the altered circumstances; nevertheless a thought of gratitude, of trust, of oneness with, and calm if undefinable repose on HIM!

I listened; amid the stillness of the night I heard him whisper in his sleep, 'My Father, who art—everywhere! For Thou and we are—ONE!'

CHAPTER VI.

'True love's the gift which God has given
To man alone beneath the heaven.
It is not fantasy's hot fire,
Whose wishes, soon as granted, fly;
It liveth not in fierce desire—
With dead desire it doth not die.
It is the secret sympathy,
The silver link, the silken tie
Which heart to heart and mind to mind
In body and in soul can bind.'—SCOTT.

I WOULD tell you, sir, of each event as it followed those preceding ones which I have endeavoured, however imperfectly, to delineate, and which have long since been matters of history, but for the claims which are constantly calling me away to other Spheres, remote indeed from yours, but to which I hope to have the pleasure of introducing you some day. The historical facts are open to your inspection at any time; but there are a few incidents which came under no eyes but my own poor Spectral ones, such as I think may interest you, as showing the kind of thought

and feeling in vogue in those days. I propose to jot a few down for your perusal.

Ralph Osborne was standing by—her side ! I saw him holding that tiny hand in his,—so hot, so pale, so fevered yet ! Her couch was raised against the window. A fancy travelled through his brain: supposing it were a real fever, and he caught it, and they both were ill together, and were both to—he couldn't think it out !

The room was darkened; the blind was flapping in and out of the partially raised window. He watched two spaniels on the lawn at play; now they were hid. The gardener was sweeping the dry leaves into a heap, but, eddying round and round, they defied his efforts, flying all about the lawn. Neither had yet spoken.

'Oh, happy, happy leaves !' thought he, 'or happy spaniels, either ! To be a spaniel or a leaf: to frolic on the grass all day, to have no pangs or woes of any sort,—which would I sooner be ? Dogs are made to mind, but I would be good,' he thought, 'and follow Beatrice all day, and sleep upon the mat outside her door, and wait for her each morning. I would always be beside her, and she would love me so ! and I'd protect her, yes, I would ! Oh, then, I'd sooner be a mastiff or Newfoundland,—they are so grand and noble-looking, and walk so leisurely along, with their big heads and conscious-looking eyes ! so near their mistress, too. But then she'd be away sometimes, and, p'raps, I mightn't be allowed to follow, and she might see another in my absence and like him even more. Oh, no, she never should ! But if she did, and brought him home—why, then, there would be a great big fight, and oh, it would all be over then ! So, no—I wouldn't be a spaniel ! A leaf ? Well, now, I'd just be anything rather than go away. A crisp, brown, good-looking, and perfect leaf ? Why, yes, if they would let me lie upon the lawn just for a time, to gaze up at her window ! Some friendly gust might whirl me up on to her sill, where I would watch her hourly. But ah ! November's rain would come, so pitiless ! and I should have to lie there, dank and motionless, and oh, so cold, and flat, and miserable; unable then to gaze, too, through her window, or fly up any more ! I wouldn't be a leaf !'

'Be calm, dear Ralph,' said Lady Gertrude before he entered her room.

'Yes, yes—I will,' was his reply.

'And try and make my darling laugh.'

'Laugh ! so I will.' For well Ralph knew that, if he only willed, his darling child should laugh, and laugh outright,—that

no one—not even frigid dames, nor maidens shelved an age, nor parsons grave, nor blushing girls in teens, nor sanctimonious hums, nor frights of any sex, calling, or Countree, nor high nor low, nor of any state whatever—could, if he only willed it, resist his influence!

'And shall she? She will not try, I know.'

He looks at those lips; they mutter something, he stoops to catch the sound.

'Ralph! Ralph! Why, how you frightened me!'

'I frighten you, my precious one!'

'Just a wee little bit,' she gently sighed.

'I thought I never could do that!'

'Not when you're near me, Ralph; but then I fancied just for a moment—you were gone!'

Ah, then to have seen the boy's bright eyes! He stooped and told her all he had been thinking of; and ended by asking which he should be—her spaniel or her leaf? And now she laughed; and then he said, 'I couldn't well be either.'

'Why, Ralph?' she asked. He hesitated. 'Why, dear Ralph?' she asked again.

'Because you are my New-found-land!' he whispered in her ear.

* * * * * * *

Each day he saw her, and she was soon able to go out as before. They wandered on the beach, prying into each cave, or sauntered through the woods gathering health and blackberries at the same time.

Their horses, the Sultan, Zoe, and Flora, had now plenty of work, for there was scarcely a ditch or fence in all that part of the county which escaped their dauntless heels.

And the Marquis and all the household were mirthful and gay again.

Chapter VII.

> ...ad I a heart for falsehood framed,
> I ne'er could injure you.'—Sheridan.

In the days I speak about, the people of the Great Countree had very extensive dealings with the people of the Old Countree, from whom they had originally sprung. They were called cousins, though brothers would have been a more appropriate term, for the reason they were always squabbling.

The people of the Old Countree had plenty of money, and

so had their cousins; but the Old Countreeans were more easily gulled into parting with it than any other people in the world. The Great Countreans knowing this used to resort to low dodges to rob them of it.

But for the audacity attending the schemes resorted to in order to make the Beloved Silver Mine a success,—in other words, a dead swindle,—the people of the Old Countree were certainly *not* prepared. For instance: they could not believe it possible that the Ambassador from the Great Countree—which pretended to rear its leviathan young head, and keep it not only on a level with, but far above the heads of all the other countrees of the earth—would affix his Great Name to a Swindle! Subscribers, Purchasers, and many Speculators believed this Ambassador, who, being a soldier of the Great Countree's, they imagined must therefore be a gentleman, when he made public the statement that he held to all his shares, though his Government compelled him to retire from the Direction of the Mine!

The Vendors also could not believe that a Great Banker and Financier in Undone city, whose Great House of Business in Money Street vied with almost any other Great House in that street, would lend his Name to a transaction in a silver mine, the prospectus of which stated that it would yield, *at the very least, eighteen per cent per annum* to the subscribers, and which yet turned out to give—nothing!

Yet it happened that General Kute, the Ambassador from the Great Countree, did soil his own and his Great Countree's reputation by lending his Name, which until then had been as untarnished as a Soldier's should ever be, to the Beloved Silver Mining Swindle!

And yet it also happened that Todigrab did lend his name, which was never much, and he lent his money, which, as a result of similar transactions, was much, to insure the successful 'floating' of the Swindle!—this being known to the Vendors alone; for the people had a just horror of this man, especially the Bankers in Money Street and the other inhabitants of Undone city. They used to ask when any new scheme was introduced, 'Whose is it?' and on hearing, would start in alarm, saying, 'Oh, it's Todigrab's! look out!' and they were sure to get their fingers burnt if they touched it; but then this man worked in the dark so much, that they scarcely ever found it out until it was too late, and they had lost all they had ventured!

Todigrab's great ambition—fatal mistake!—was to mix among the Aristocracy of the Old Countree, and to be thought an honest man! He hoped by ostentatious acts of generosity—using the

funds supplied by his wretched dupes for such purposes!—to cause the world in time to forget the means to which he had resorted in order to acquire his prodigious wealth,—to be able to hand down to succeeding generations 'a highly respectable banking firm,'—to have *his name* engraven on *their hearts*, and that they, in time to come, would hold It in honoured remembrance, and speak of him in those days as—its Venerable Founder!

Chapter VIII.

> 'for Cyril, howe'er
> He deal in frolic, as to-night, the song
> Might have been worse, and sinn'd in grosser lips
> Beyond all pardon. As it is, I hold
> These flashes on the surface are not he:
> He has a solid base of temperament;
> But as the water-lily starts and slides
> Upon the level in little puffs of wind,
> Though anchor'd to the bottom, such is he.'—Tennyson.

'Floating' the Beloved Silver Mine was the work of a genius—whether depraved or no is for the critical historian to determine; the Spectre narrates facts and events alone. Some people called it the Dilemma, but Beloved was its more usual and sweetest name.

Before leaving Trememdon, Viscount Playfair had remarked in conversation to Ralph, 'The Great Countree's Ambassador, so I am given to understand, knows there is no silver in the Mine, and he did sell all his shares when his Government bade him retire from its Direction, although he proclaimed to the contrary. I hear, too,' continued he calmly, and with a contemptuous sneer upon his noble features, 'that Todigrab, who negotiated the transaction, has not only sold every share he possessed, but also a heavy "bear" of them as well, knowing the thing to be utterly worthless; and here is my poor father madly buying all the time!'

Ralph sighed, and said it was indeed dreadful, and promised his friend that he would find out all he could immediately upon his return to town. Thereupon the Viscount urged him, 'But don't go to Maxwell about it; from what I see of him, he is quite capable of telling six different clients six different stories of the same venture, whichever one suited his book!'

* * * * * * *

'I say, you, what's-your-name!' halloo'd out Ralph to a Vortex broker, a Committee-man, 'what about the "Beloved"

Silver Mine? don't know, eh?' Coming across a knot of talkers, he asked, 'What about the "Beloved"?'

'"Beloved!" "Dilemma," you mean! Absurd—"bear" it! Don't buy, sir,—sell a "bear"! It's going to the devil. "Beloved" Silver Mine, indeed!'

'Worth buying at 22," said another.

'If you sold at 32, and will take small profits,—not without. It's going to the devil fast.'

'Is that the mine they won't allow any one to go down?' asked Nuthook, a small jobber.

'Of course; then what can you expect?'

'But surely gentlemen don't put their names down to a Swindle!' said Ralph innocently.

'Swindle, sir! Who said Swindle? I didn't,—did I, Nuthook?'

Nuthook, looking the broker in the face,—half-closing his fish-like eyes, the lashes of which were gummed together, and the saliva running down the corners of his mouth the while,—smirked, winked, and delivered himself thus:

'Swindle?—no such word! Business!—Vortex business!—we have no other term here!'

'I don't care what terms you have, sir,' said Ralph hotly; 'I call a Swindle a Swindle, as I do a Spade a Spade, and a Thief a Thief, whether in the Vortex or out of it; and by ——, if this is one, the world shall hear of it.'

Nuthook smirked again, the water still trickling and running down his chin on to his shirt-front—this seeming to be the only method of getting relief to his feelings. The broker looked deprecatingly at Ralph.

'No use getting warm over it, sir; you can't help the matter that way;' and *sotto voce*, 'nor any other way, that I know of!'

'Your Committee can,' said Ralph, 'it's all their doing!'

'Oh!' said this broker, 'perhaps they have a finger in the pie!—sure to, or nothing would ever be done!'

'What do you mean?' demanded Ralph.

'No "business,"' said the broker.

'No Swindles, you mean!' roared Ralph.

'No such term known on the Vortex, sir.'

'But Swindles are!' said Ralph.

'*We* have a more playful term for them,' interposed a gray-headed old gentleman, who had been quiet hitherto.

'What may that be?' asked Ralph.

'Footballs,' said this member of the Undone Vortex.

Ralph looked from one to the other of the little group in amazement—not a muscle moved upon the face of either. The atom of indignation displayed by the jobber Nuthook—the greatest he was ever known to possess—being expended, his mouth and chin were now presentable, his eyes remaining the same, however.

'You see,' said Gray-hairs, 'we are idle in the Vortex at times—the inhabitants in Undone city and in the Old Countree being naturally sick and tired of our doings, past and present—ha! ha! At times, therefore, to bring in grist, we are apt to indulge in a little recreation. *We* find it good for the temper!'

Then followed a chuckle and the Vortex grin—these men had no hearty laugh about them!

'At the public expense, of course?' said Ralph.

'Of course, of course, my young friend,' replied Gray-hairs.

They adjourned to the 'Vaults,' Ralph accompanying them in the vain hope of hearing something let drop about the 'Beloved.' There had just been another 'panic' on, and they were all full of that! 'Beloveds' were a thing of the past, as far as these men were concerned—they had 'burst,' and were only good for a 'bear.' The 'panic' Swindle was the all-absorbing topic now—such talk! such fortunes! Ah, how Trememdon had changed him! he felt a veteran amongst them! Let them talk! He had lost very large sums of money indeed, but more funds having come in, he was again very well off, and he was not going to risk it on the Vortex—not he! Before closing his letter to Reginald he would just call upon Maxwell, however.

Chapter IX.

'Who dares think one thing and another tell,
My heart detests him as the gates of hell.'—Pope.

If Walter Maxwell flourished upon Lies, Ralph Osborne uxuriated in—Love.

'Who is Maxwell?' had asked Reginald of him before separating.

'My half-brother,' Ingenuous had replied.

'Yes, and how alike you are! in repose, exactly—when animated, never. How odd! perhaps you "throw back" to some old fellow or other, an ancestor of yours.'

'Our dispositions are dissimilar.'

'Very—it is a fatality, Ralph. Well, what is he?'

'I do not know,' replied Truthful; and the Viscount was compelled to form his own opinion.

He had been to town and brought Mr. and Mrs. Fullheart back with him. She knew so much of Ralph's family connections, his principles and general habits, that the Marchioness soon regarded her as a warm friend, and learnt to cling to her when anxious thoughts forced themselves uppermost. When Mrs. Fullheart talked the matter over with her husband, she spoke like a sensible woman. She doted on 'her babes,' as she called them.

'But, Frank, even babes must be supported,' said she. 'Love is made up of bread-and-butter, boots, rooms, warm beds, curtains, carriages, lamps, horses, books, beef, seaside trips, and all the rest; and without these, why, where is Love! Ah, Love! thou takest wings, and mighty strong ones too.'

Had Ralph Osborne heard her, he would have answered in his impetuous headstrong way: 'Love!—'tis all to me! I want no bread-and-butter, nor boots, nor anything! Seaside trips and bracing air, and liveries, and every luxury, are good enough for those who care for such things; but give me my Birdie and Love—and Love is Birdie—and then all the rest may vanish, so I have Birdie's deep, fond, pure affection—herself—my all!'

But Ralph was ro-man-tic! If he had been starving he would have loved the same; but if she had wanted the flimsiest veriest fancy, he would have worked for her with all his soul and will—honestly; but he could never think of Love and Money in the same hour, so it was of no use talking!

Chapter X.

'By thy cold heart and serpent smile,
By thy unfathomed gulf of guile,
By that most seeming-virtuous eye,
By thy shut soul's hypocrisy,
By the perfection of thine art,
Which passed for human thine own heart,
By thy delight in others' pain,
And by thy brotherhood of Cain—
I call upon thee, and compel
Thyself to be thy proper Hell.
Lo! the spell now works around thee,
And the clankless chain hath bound thee;
O'er the heart and brain together
Hath the word been passed—now wither!'—Byron.

'We never, never can be separated—not for an hour, my child! Whoever leaves the other first will hover round the other, Birdie!'

Thus had they parted! Open as the noontide, they had no thought reserved. It could not be helped, and I really do not think they wished it otherwise. As the ball had been unavoidably postponed till Christmas, and Ralph expected to meet all his friends again then, he sallied forth to Walter's office. They were all delighted to meet the 'forlorn hope' again. The 'Beloved' Silver Mine was not discussed, however, but Walter's wines were excellent, while liqueurs and spirits abounded.

Slasher, Stanley, and Somers, besides a host of others, were crowding the place; Maxwell was more amusing than ever; he knew every one in Undone city. Portraits of the most prominent Vortex members adorned his office walls.

Now I saw that in Walter's presence Ralph seemed to forget that he had ever had such a thing as 'an unfortunate account.' Clencher and the other clerks being out, Walter, admonished by the 'House' telegraph, went to attend to it. Brokers were constantly dropping in; Ralph knew one of them. Haw-haw Horksigh knew Ralph in a moment, but as he had no chance of 'doing business' with him, looked clean over him as he did on Triton pier on a former occasion. The telegraphic tape having exuded its tale, Haw-haw guttralled forth, 'Bye-bye, boys! I mus' b'off'—probably having too many 'bear' margin-run-out clients for his own happiness, 'things' were rising so after the late 'panic'!

'Haw-haw was formerly in the Bungaland army—did you know him?' asked Maxwell of Somers.

'Everybody knew Haw-haw,' replied Harry, 'and now he's a Vortex broker—what a drop!'

'Yeth,' interposed Stanley, 'but itth money-making, you know, ha, ha, ha, ha!'

Maxwell now said, 'Come, boys, and let's feed at Broom's—it's not far; I stand.'

All having agreed, they adjourned. Serious thoughts and cares found no footing in the breasts of any there. Such little occurrences as Dealers failing and not paying sixpence, 'Attachments' being lodged to the annoyance of friends, and Swindles being foisted upon the public, were

'Trifles light as air.'

Now I saw that although Ralph combated the influences which surrounded him with all his power, he yet was unable entirely to succeed. He sat still and thought,

'How clever Walter is! so advanced—so unlike me!'

'Were you bitten by that failure?' asked Ralph, his mind

reverting to the non-sixpenny-paying jobber. There had been so many failures since then—but failures in the Vortex were always 'hushed up,' and *names were never mentioned, like in other trades!* —that Walter could not guess what he was driving at.

'Hang failures!' said he, 'who talks of failures here?'

'I do,' replied Ralph; 'you can't forget that beastly jobber, who—'

'Other jobbers,' said Walter abruptly.

'Lucky fellow!' exclaimed Ralph warmly.

Walter asked Ralph how he was getting on?—just, thought Ralph, as though he didn't know.

'Given it up long ago!' said he. Never did a wetter blanket cause completer silence! Regretting the result, Ralph carelessly asked Walter what he thought of 'things' in general; and the conversation again flowing, Walter observed, 'Bank-rate must fall Thursday—I've fifty on it; means cheap money—up go "things"—and then *get out's* my maxim, and let the fools come in! Never say die, boys!—up and at 'em!

"Let poltroons stay behind;
For curs we've no regard."

Ha! ha! ha! ha! ha! ha!'

The four friends sat amazed; they at first even doubted their senses, and then looked from the one to the other in utter perplexity; for there stood—not that Witch in Ralph's dream, but a weirder, more fascinating Tempter! While every bosom heaved with emotion, Walter went on,

'I see a way as clear as light to work it, and when W. M. says a thing, he means it. I've done it before—I'm doing it now; and by —— I'll do it again! That's it, eh, Slasher?'

The dragoon captain said quietly that it might be very well for those on the spot to dabble—

'Thometimeth!' interposed Stanley.

'Yes, sometimes,' added Oswald, 'and no doubt splendid fortunes are made.'

'And lotht!' came from the lisper. 'But—' continued he; then fearing lest the harmony should again be interrupted he stopped.

'Well, I never advise, or else—' and Maxwell broke off as suddenly.

Here Ralph wishing to inquire about 'Beloveds,' Maxwell begged them to excuse him. Saying he would be back directly—which meant not at all—and that they were to call for what they liked, he left the room.

And Ralph Osborne went home and sighed. He seemed to waver and forget his resolutions, his regrets, and his past miseries ! In the short space of one hour—it was not more—he had become quite unsettled, and he asked himself, 'What use am I? Ah, but I saved those lives !' And then, with feelings of honest pride, he recalled those scenes of heroism and triumph, and contrasted them with those days of wretchedness and misery before he loved, when he became the sport of every wind that blew. 'And yet,' said he, 'I cannot marry on Love, and settle down on nothing else, oh, my little darling ! no, no, no !' And then he thought, 'Why was I born? I am of no use to anybody—I live for nobody—nobody lives for—'

('Tis false !' I breathed; 'nor dare to—oh, Ralph ! how can you thus so soon forget !')

And I heard him sobbing forth, 'My Beatrice ! my precious flower ! Trememdon's rose !'

Chapter XI.

'Vice is a monster of so frightful mien,
As to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.'—Pope.

'I tell you what, Raskall, that "Syndicate" will never "float" the loan—it stinks already!'

'Leave that to me,' said Clencher to Walter; 'you're game for eighty thou. Leave that to me.'

'Why, the *Bullion-monger's* got an article against it already !'

'Buy him off, then—hard cash !'

'Oh, I know all about that; but you can't buy 'em all off; why, there's the *Tellibuster's* got two letters in, running it down !'

'Put in by the Editor—tell that by his style : dine him well and feel him—that's his "form"—money !'

There was a pause; Walter suddenly said,

'By the bye, should Osborne turn up here, tell him I know nothing whatever about "*investments*" (truth, for once, I thought), and—I'm not at home.'

Raskall eyed the young man keenly, and was silent.

'I sha'n't touch this "Syndicate business,"' said Walter, rising to go. The other stood against the door which led to the outer office, and, looking Walter straight in the face, said, with an air of conscious power,

'You will! I've told them so, and—you must!'

Walter blanched, bit his lips, and, pacing the floor once or twice, said in bitter accents,

'I never did you a wrong yet—why thus pursue me?'

'And I never led you wrong yet—why mistrust me?' replied the other.

Walter did mistrust Clencher, however, but could not, for certain reasons, afford to defy him. As a rule, Walter had no *confidants;* but, strange to say, he was completely in the power of this man.

'Well, then, "in and out" this time,' groaned Walter.

'And what about Osborne?' asked Raskall. He spoke slowly, and, dwelling upon each word, eyed Walter as a serpent watches its prey.

'Am—I—to—send—Osborne—away?' asked Clencher, still watching him.

Walter rose, uncorked a bottle of fine old Bergundy, and quickly swallowed three—four glasses, and then two more in fast succession. He then glared horribly around, and trembled violently.

'What's the matter?' coolly inquired Raskall of him.

'Oh, nothing. Oh, well—do I understand—' and Walter stopped short.

'*I* understand, Maxwell,' said Clencher slowly.

'Oh—yes—of course—you—I,' gasped Walter, taking a turn round the room, Raskall still keeping his position with his back against the door. He now said deliberately,

'You—I—*we*—can manage *him!*'

'No, no! Raskall; I won't have him—I—' Walter hesitated.

'Then—he—will—marry—*her!*' cried Clencher tauntingly.

Walter writhed. Suddenly advancing to the door and raising his cane, he demanded in loudest tones,

'Unsay those words, or I will—'

'You will thrash me. Well, you are stronger than I am,' said the cur, 'and I shall appeal to the law,' continued he, taking a few steps towards a window overlooking the street; 'touch me, and I'll have the police in the room in an instant!'

'Oh, you're one of those "irresponsible people," are you?' said Walter, with a sneer.

'He *shall* marry her!' replied Raskall with warmth, again making towards the door. Walter interposing now exclaimed,

'By God! this is too much; my brother, too—'

'Your brother! yours!' hissed Clencher, snapping his fingers in the other's face contemptuously; 'much you care—'

'I'll not be spoken to—'

'I'll speak, then. Come, Maxwell,' said Raskall, with a knowing grin; 'I'm a man of the world, and so are you. *We know each other;* you shrug your shoulders !—ah, none so well ! You hate your brother—don't get angry ! confess it ! he stands in your way; get him out—*ruin him!*' he wheezed, jerking his arm significantly towards the Vortex, which was close contiguous. '*Syndicate!*' he hissed, 'what more do you want? ha-hia-ha !'

Raskall now left his post at the door in triumph, as he noticed the weird expression playing around Walter's high cheek-bones, drawing down his eyes, and lifting up the corners of his mouth, until his expression became demoniacal. How long it would have remained in that cast it is impossible to estimate, for he was past feeling embarrassment, and no one in that room questioned him. Clencher, however, having drunk off three glasses of sherry in less time than it takes to record the feat, asked Walter, amid a death-like silence, during which nothing could be heard but the strife between 'bulls' and 'bears' in the adjoining Vortex, the simple question, in drawn-out, quiet, measured tones,

'Now—am—I—to—send—Osborne—away?'

'Send him in to me when he calls,' replied Walter, in a husky voice. 'Don't go away !—don't !' implored he, in an agitated manner, as Raskall prepared to leave—so cool and self-possessed, that one would have conjectured, to look at him, that he had only been consulting his employer relative to the 'margin of cover' on some poor unfortunate client's account !

I saw Walter trying to mumble a biscuit, which he washed down with at least half a dozen more glasses of the tempting fluid, passing the bottle to Clencher, who declined. Then drawing a long sigh, saying, 'Now, then, I'm ready !' he left the office, encased in an impregnable shroud of Lust and Greed, seeking whom else he might devour. He had made but a feeble resistance, and had succumbed.

Chapter XII.

'I dare do all that may become a man ;
Who dares do more is none.'—Shakespeare.

It wanted a quarter to four. Ralph was in a state of intense excitement and high glee—in three days' time he hoped to be at that jolly old place Trememdon, with his fortune made !

'December 21,' I heard him say, 'two—three—*four, go down!* hurrah!' He was watching one of his Vortex brokers—Jacob Cautilous Dapper—Ralph had several now—laughing with an incipient pigeon, who was evidently momentarily on the right side of the hedge. How immoderately the Vortex sailor laughed! slapping his thighs, and chuckling away, while Jacob told him how nicely and 'cutely he had 'done his bargain' and the 'jobber' at the same time, who, 'reading' him a 'buyer,' lost the 'full turn,' Jacob said. Greenhorn believed Jacob: it might have been true, and ought, as Jacob was 'a sworn broker;' but what was there to check it in those days, when nobody could go inside the Vortex to do it for himself? 'Not the "*Official List*," certainly,' Markham would have told Greenhorn, who was now experiencing a thrill of delight, which thrill he communicated to his friends at the club that night, and which thrill eventually brought ever so many 'clients' to be tickled, thrilled, and victimised at Jacob's shrine! *He* never failed to let you know how well he dealt, and how clever he was! And Jacob was clever!

Greenhorn was so pleased, that he took at least a dozen fellows into 'the Vaults' at once—all that he could see, and there were lots about, without going into the highways and byways—and there he treated them to 'little goes' all round.

The Spectre soliloquised thus:

'Idiot! keep what you've plundered! There are bigger robbers about—you won't have it long!'

* * * * * * *

'Fifty thousand solid sovereigns in your pocket!' rang in Ralph's ears, and tingled them like the last trump is going to do to all jolly Saints when, the earth beginning to shake, they will be found looking forward to 'the heritage!' But when Walter had said this, he little thought the 'rise' would last so long.

When it was all done, and Ralph was making money every moment, and Walter and Clencher were both grilling on a slow fire, I saw the boy thinking it all over, and wondering how it came about, and if it were real, &c. I don't think he cared much about it; I'm sure he didn't for his own sake, for there was something in that breast pocket of his, which he kept pulling out at intervals—a little packet, which contained two likenesses of one and the same fairy form, taken in different positions—which engrossed more of his attention than all the 'Syndicates' in Undone city!

After all, it was a most unheard-of rise—might all have gone the other way, people said. And there was Walter with only 'eighty thou.,' and Ralph now had ever so many more than that;

but, then, they were not paid for, whereas Walter's could have been at any moment!

And yet Ralph had combated the idea of entering again into Speculation with all his might. Reginald's unfinished letter still lay upon his table; and then he had called on Walter again.

'I never advise,' said Walter; 'meet me again—chop—Herschell's—one!'

One o'clock came; there came no Maxwell. A clerk handed in Walter's card—'Come at once—special!'

'Heard the news, Ralph? Thought not. Rate's down one per cent! Feller doubled bet—made my hundred—"things" going up like mad. Don't go "investing!" Come in for a few thou. have yer?'

Walter perceiving that Ralph was not at all inclined to speculate, said again, in an off-hand manner,

'I never advise; but a "Syndicate" forming—quite "mum"—all first-class men—that's your go. I'll try it for you, if you like; it's as good, you know, as fifty thou.'

'What ever do you mean, Walter, to me?' exclaimed Ralph excitedly; 'fifty thou—'

'Fifty thousand solid sovereigns in your pocket!' said Walter, looking at his brother complacently; and then, beginning to write a letter, added in the most absent tone he could assume, 'think it over, you know, Ralph, and let me know to-morrow.'

They separated; but Ralph couldn't think it over. He was not absent long. Turning back to his brother's office in haste, he dashed in, exclaiming in breathless haste,

'When can you let me know for certain, Walter?'

'Er—what matter—er—are you—er—refer—'

'The Syndicate! the Syndicate that you—' burst forth Ralph.

'Call at four o'clock,' said Walter, finishing his letter.

'Tell me,' asked Ralph, 'what are "Beloveds" doing?'

'Some one thinks they're flourishing, I expect; look here!'

Ralph read a letter from the Marquis, instructing Walter to make purchases for him to a fabulous amount, enclosing a cheque for 'differences' which made Ralph's former losses pale into utter insignificance. The letter read like a fairy tale, the amounts were so enormous. Ralph felt sick at heart; Walter was humming a lively tune all the while.

'Why, Walter, there are not so many shares *in* the mine!'

'Don't matter!' said Walter coolly.

'Oh, stop him!' cried Ralph. 'These are *Speculative!* and the damnable thing's falling every hour!'

'Each one for himself, and God for—'

'Devil, say !' interposed Ralph, his face flushing, while his frame trembled.

'Say "Devil," then; same in the end,' cried Walter savagely.

The postscript ordered the purchase of a million more "Back-away' loan, and 'hoped he found the deeds correct,' 'sorry to give him trouble,' &c.

'What's this ?' asked Ralph, in horror.

'Merely a matter of "business."' Walter took the letter, while Ralph exclaimed, 'reading' his brother, as he thought,

'I sha'n't touch the Syndicate unless you do.'

'I go in for eighty thou.,' coolly replied Walter.

* * * * * * *

'No need to write about "Beloved" now,' thought Ralph, sauntering away, the 'fifty thousand solid sovereigns' taking entire possession of him, the while hanging about the precincts of the Vortex, whose courts seemed to reek with woe, dissipation, blasted prospects, shattered constitutions, and broken hearts—as much so as if he had been able to stoop and trace with his finger, in tangible letters of human blood, the miseries with which they were infested; they even yet had a strange kind of fascination for him !

'Oh, but for one return of those days,' thought he, 'when my Stocks were mounting so ! My Stocks !—my very own ! what exquisite enjoyment !—the gambler's own ! Ah, how even now I crave for it with all the eagerness of a devotee to Speculation's shrine !'

He did give one thought to the possibility of his losing; but not as to what She would say were he to ask her advice—her advice !—as to whether—the words refused to come; he could not talk of them in the same breath !

'But Walter must be right; he would not lead *me* wrong—my brother ! And then Beatrice will—then there will be some hope Oh, God ! she loves me so !'

> Thus speaks a voice so still, so small,
> And yet so powerful withal—
> The still, small voice of Conscience !
> The voice of Love will oft inflame
> To deeds of might and lofty aim,
> When sleeps the voice of Conscience.

And Ralph had thought, by some mighty deed, to win fame and fortune for—her !

Leaving those pale, haggard, anxious faces to chatter over the merits (?) of stocks and shares, gesticulating like maniacs, quoting the opinions of their favourite papers, giving their own, ignorant

of the fact that they knew nothing whatever about them, he hastened away from a scene of such broken-down misery, muttering as he went along, 'My case is different. I'm going to join a Syndicate.' Four o'clock came.

'No go, Ralph—awful pity—very sorry!' was Walter's exclamation on seeing Ralph enter. And then the poor boy saw fifty thousand solid sovereigns—so solid that he almost felt to grasp them, and they were always called 'solid' when you were to be drawn on, sir—gliding, slipping, fading away into Space, and with them every joy in life and death and—everywhere!

'How much is wanted—is it a question of tin?' asked Ralph, the beads of perspiration standing out upon his forehead, his hat half off behind, and his air feverish and eager.

'Nothing else,' was the quiet reply.

Need the rest be told, sir? How that the money *was* forthcoming—for Walter made up the difference, Ralph calling him 'noble fellow,' and while he hugged him in his ecstasy not noticing his brother's high cheek-bones, or that his frame was as chill and immovable as a block of marble; how that within an hour Ralph was introduced to members of this famous Syndicate, as well as to the various brokers, the only words vibrating in the air being, 'Tremendous rise!' 'Mum, you know!' 'Syndicate!' 'Great success!' that, all restraints being broken down, Ralph, captivated by the sounds, raved on in the old mad way. Money must be cheap, coming in from all quarters together—can't give authority, &c. &c.

* * * * * * *

And I heard the poor boy repeating, 'Ah, to live once more, to be so near to her!' And I heard a broker mock the while he grinned and chuckled, 'Hia-hia-ha!' and from that moment Jacob had marked Ralph for his own.

'I love her,' said Ralph aloud. 'Nobody loves as I love—nobody!'

And Jacob heard, and said aloud to him confidingly, 'Such great pluck is worthy of success!' And Jacob was Raskall's cousin, and he enticed Ralph into buying much more Speculatively. And Jacob was gay with the merry, sedate with the serious, urging prudence to the rash—should their 'cover' be low, breathing hope into the desponding—with a good margin left. Jocose with the knowing ones was Jacob, condescending to the uninitiated plump pigeon, devoted to his female clients, and funny with all.

'And what do you think of "Beloveds"?' asked Ralph one day.

'Got any?' asked Jacob.

'Friend has,' said Ralph.

'I hear that a certain nobleman' (mentioning his name) 'is largely interested.'

'I fear so,' replied Ralph.

'*By the bye, Osborne, any business you can influence to me of his I will allow you half-commission upon.*'

Jacob told Ralph this so confidentially, and hopped off so nimbly to allow the words to take effect, that Ralph was stunned for the moment. Jacob had got into *Alsatia* by the time Ralph had roared at the top of his voice, drawing himself up very much like a camel as he did so, 'What the devil do you take me for, sir?' Ralph got hot in the face at the bare idea of anybody suspecting him of being capable of accepting for his own personal use half-commissions on the business of a friend, and that friend the Marquis of Trememdon, as though he—Ralph Osborne—were a common tout!

Chapter XIII.

'"A jolly place," said he, "in times of old;
But something ails it now; the spot is cursed."'
WORDSWORTH.

A few days later on I saw Ralph Osborne and Lady Beatrice Playfair talking together in a half-subterranean passage or corridor of the large marquee which was raised over the Ancient Court at Old Trememdon. The ball was on, the pace had been tremendous, and they were now resting, cool and secure from the rush of dancers, amidst the fragrance and perfume of delicious shrubs and flowers.

They had not been seated long upon a projecting stem of an old gnarled ivy-tree which had flourished and luxuriated for centuries since the Old Court had lapsed into disuse, when the little pet at Ralph's side burst into a gay laugh which went through him in a moment. 'Oh, how capital to get me away from Walter,' she said, 'wasn't it? I never could dance with Walter—not *dance*, you know.'

Ralph looked at her, as with colour heightened with the exercise she seemed too beautiful for earth. 'Uncle Allan was engaged, or he would have helped me,' she said. 'I'm such a pet of Uncle Allan's, Ralph.'

'You're such a pet of everybody's,' he whispered.

'Indeed I'm not.' she said, looking dubiously at Ralph. 'I

am of Alfred's though. How I do wish Alfred were with us now, dear Ralph!'

'Ah, Alfred,' Ralph whispered.

'Yes, Alfred,' she whispered too.

Now Ralph had come down to Trememdon resolved to be—practical.

The Spectre laughs—he cannot help it. 'Ralph practical'! He thought he would seek an interview, and only one—not in the crowded ball-room, oh, no! but in some quiet nook, be it in Castle turret, be it in snow-clad ravine, or down in furthest woods—somewhere, ay, anywhere, so that it be alone with Birdie; there to pour forth his soul to her, when each would feel it almost sacrilege to gaze into each other's eyes—for all was felt—that 'all,' so indescribable, so evanescent, that e'en a glance would dissipate and waft it hither and thither, so that, should it by chance return, that 'all' had lost its freshness—'twas not the same, its charm—itself was gone!

Thus philosophised Ralph Osborne.

And now the little creature at his side looked more than mortal; and as they moved far down the passage they came to a bend, with a corner beyond, round which the corridor led again into the grand saloon.

Just here they felt as much away from human gaze as in a wilderness or on a vast ocean beach, with no sights, no sounds but rippling waves and sighing winds.

I watched them for an instant longer; they said but little, and now neither spoke a word—their hearts were full, perhaps. Ah, I hasted away, to keep intruders out by every conceivable Spectral means.

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Soon after I saw them coming back. Oh, tell it in a whisper! —nay, hardly breathe. I do think Ralph had!

I do think Birdie had!

If one had, both had! I never saw Ralph looking so before, and I have ever watched him. And she was like the summer's rose upon the spotless snow!

'Don't let us dance any more to-night, Ralph, my head is so hot!' I heard her say. 'It gets so now so quickly after my tumble from the pony-carriage.'

Emma Louise Osborne came up just after, leaning on Captain Slasher's arm.

'Brothers and sisters never do,' Ralph had always said.

Birdie kissed his sister Emma directly after though, and Ralph wisely turned away.

'It's all about papa I want to talk,' she said to Ralph, as soon as they were gone; 'he is so changed! I wish Alfred had never left, for Reggy is so much away, and—' She stopped, for the Marquis, coming up, said,

'I'm sure I'm very pleased to hear of your great success in the City, Mr. Osborne; it's quite the talk, I hear. If business will not allow you to stay, you must come down and see us as soon as you can.'

It was true. The Syndicate had indeed carried all before it; outside fools had eagerly flocked in, and seized upon a worthless 'thing' which had risen to a high premium, and Ralph was growing richer every day!

The lovers saw the Marquis rejoin Walter.

'What can Walter want so much with papa?' asked she.

Ralph said he thought it must be 'business.'

'But is it *Speculative Business?*' asked the little three-days-old plaintively. Ralph was fairly staggered. 'Because I do not like it, and I should be so grieved—it would quite break my heart!'

Ralph trembled, and clasped her in his arms, and then exclaimed, 'Oh, there's a lot of money to be made out of it sometimes.'

'I wouldn't mind if millions could—*I* shouldn't like it,' pursued she with a little sob.

'Oh, you little goose!' cried he, trying to assume a cheerful air.

'I cannot help it if I am,' she said plaintively, trembling, and nestling closer to his side.

Ralph felt like a guilty wretch, and said no more.

'Dear Ralph! oh, look at poor papa!' cried she. Ralph pressed his hand on hers, she clasping his arm with both her tiny hands. They neared the corner, she whispering in his ear, 'This is the haunted corridor! I wouldn't come at night for all the world!'

'Why, Birdie dear,' he said, 'it is night;' and watched her bright eyes flash and sparkle as she said,

'But, Ralph, I'm with you now. I'd go with you right round the world!'

I thought it well to leave them here—I never could bear scenes. When I returned, I overheard her begging Ralph to

'Tell me all about papa and Walter—I know you will.' She looked quite wicked as she added, 'I hate that Walter Maxwell, that I do!'

She heard a rustling sound beyond the shrubs, which had not caught his ear; he sat himself upon the root of ivy as she faded

from his view among the trees and shrubs, repeating, 'I hate him so!' stamping the ground with fairy virgin feet at every word she uttered. Emerging into the light, she suddenly turns quite pale—the colour mounts again, while stamping her naughty little foot, she cries,

'I wish he heard me, Ralph; I want to tell him how I hate—'

Her shriek was fearful. Springing madly to the spot, he caught her in his arms as she fell heavily to the ground. She had just before been gazing intently towards the extreme end, where a calm spectator might now have heard the rustle of a dress amid receding footsteps; two figures were seen emerge and saunter unconcernedly towards the band, but Ralph now saw no object but the unconscious burden resting in his arms.

Chapter XIV.

'Back to the ball-room speed your spectred host;
Fool's paradise is dull to that you lost.

. . . . . .

No damsel faints when rather closely pressed,
But more caressing seems when most caressed;
Superfluous hartshorn and reviving salts—
Both banished by the sovereign cordial, Waltz.

. . . . . .

Endearing Waltz! . . . .
. . . country dance, forego
Your future claims to each fantastic toe!
Waltz, Waltz alone, both legs and arms demands,
Liberal of feet, and lavish of her hands;
Hands which may freely range in public sight
Where ne'er before—but—pray "put out the light."
Methinks the glare of yonder chandelier
Shines much too far, or I am much too near;
And, true though strange, Waltz whispers this remark,
"My slippery steps are safest in the dark!"
And here the Muse with due decorum halts,
And lends her longest petticoat to Waltz.'—Byron.

'What fiend has dared to terrify my darling?' I heard the wild youth utter.

Fresh music had begun. Tiny footfalls, brilliant eyes, dainty and bewitching forms, rustling dresses, sparkling jewels, and the clear, merry laugh of youth now excited, only to madden him. The hum of many voices bewildered him, and while all sought him, his soul was sorrowful and absent.

Among the many City friends whom Walter, at the Marquis's request, had brought down to Trememdon, were St. Peter Gallwood and his daughter Tabitha. When Lady Beatrice had been safely and quietly deposited on the sofa in the hall drawing-room of the Castle, Tabitha had only just left the Ghost's Walk.

Now Tabitha was three things. First, she was an incipient cat; second, she was red-haired; and third, a Saintess in her father's right.

Lady Beatrice was the belle of the ball. Little wonder then that Tabitha was allowed to enjoy in silence the remark that, 'It's all very fine, that Lady Beatrice shamming like that! She won't get over me if she does Mr. Osborne! ugh!'

When the untoward incident was given out by some to have been owing to the results of a fall from which she had only lately recovered, and that she dearly loved dancing, and felt the deprivation acutely, Tabitha was again heard to moralise, 'How indeed could that be, when she had been overheard to exclaim in high tones only a minute before that "she hated waltzing—that she did!"? ugh! ugh!'

The motives which had influenced Walter in bringing 'such persons' down to Trememdon did not all at once appear. Ralph had looked the picture of savage misery in the drawing-room. 'Birdie,' I heard him fondly whisper, 'must I go?'

Sir, you've heard the purling brook upon a summer's day? That was Birdie's 'yes.' Her long hair hung around her neck and shoulders, down far below her waist. Moist with the water which had been freely thrown upon her, it mingled now with Ralph's. And with that 'yes' there trembled forth from out her lips a perfume all her own! The Marchioness was still asleep beside them. Throwing his arms around her, I saw his manly lips hover about those cheeks so plump and round; and then their range got closer—near the teaniest, wee-est— Oh, sir, but I tore myself away, although I was a Spectre, nor back came I until with safety I could venture. The boy was saying, 'Then must I go? Well, I may go whirling round, but I shall not *dance* again to-night!'

The Marchioness now awoke, and said she would stay with Birdie; he mournfully left the room.

'There'th thomething wrong with Othborne—thee now, Othie, how wild and odd he lookth to-night!' One pair of dark, glittering eyes alone of all assembled there possessed a charm for Ralph.

'Why, Walter!' he exclaimed.

'My cousin Geraldine—my brother Ralph;' and in the next

moment Walter had handed his cousin Geraldine Ogilvie to his brother. Ralph began to wonder, as he now detected a slight cast in her eyes, whether it was that which so intensified the fascination of her glance. 'And what a figure for the fastest waltz!' thinks he.

They were soon pacing down the saloon together, and she was racy, and he immersed in thought.

'And how is darling Beatrice?' she asked.

'How dangerously her bright eyes glitter!' thinks he. 'I'll go where she will lead me anyhow!' then asks, 'Have you a dance for me? give me your programme.'

He looks. 'Your next's with Walter too; I am unfortunate.'

'No, not at all; Walter will give it up to you.'

She beckons him. Ralph saunters off, but soon returning, 'Good God! why, damn the fellow!' I heard him mutter, 'there's Walter's old, old look—more weird, more diabolical than ever! the old fatal expression! It draws his eyes,—it lifts the corners of his mouth! And this my brother!—the son of my own dear mother!'

In an excited manner he gazed around. Retreating, he muttered, 'Ah! shall I now hear that voice dart through canvas?' Closely followed by Geraldine, he hurried off. She came up smiling. 'Quick, quick! we're all behind, the music has begun!'

Again a gorgeous pair of eyes confronts him. Her pliant form and his are blending into one; the syren yields to his warm, strong embrace—he dares not speak lest he should break the spell. Down the long saloon they glide. Step moves with step, as though ethereal were the tread. During the light and softer tones the ecstatic harmony pervades his soul—thoughts, feelings, senses, each enthralled!

All stand aside. The waltz is done. Yet wilder music flows. Ralph notes the change. She listens not, but once he glances round. They're near the band, where Maxwell's chatting gaily to the chief. And Ralph and Geraldine are dancing quite alone, —no daring couple share their bold adventure.

The music stops. 'Far, far too soon!' he cries; and all because she asked, 'How's darling Beatrice?'

* * * * * * *

'Indeed you are too kind to say so, but all men say such things! Oh! but then I dote on dancing, and once a ball is past, I think of nothing else for days!'

'Ah, so do I!' said Headstrong eagerly.

She paused, then suddenly exclaimed, 'I love that step of yours!' He felt her breath upon his cheek, and as he gazed he

wondered how he had overlooked those glittering eyes, and felt an inward awe as he thought they'd lost the cast as if by magic.

'Why, Geraldine, you'd make a queen of tragedy!' said he.

'But do you call me pretty?' she asked.

'Terribly so!' replied young Wonder-stricken.

'Ah, well,' she said in pensive accents, 'now am I pretty? I do not think I am.'

'What if I say you're not?' asked he.

'I'd like you all the better—please say away!'

'You're fascinating—very.'

'Oh, fascinating!' she drawled; 'no higher claim to your distinction?'

'Slightly bewitching,' replied the youth.

'A term I can't take in; I've very much to learn, but then I've not left school; I'm only young—nineteen! I'm ever learning; in the shady vales, on mountain-tops, and then in cities. Midst solitude or numbers 'tis one, so that I learn. And now I learn afresh! I'm rather bewitching, ha, ha!' pursued the girl with a quickness that kept Ralph in a state of semi-distraction.

'May I say "most," then, Geraldine?'

'Oh, as you will. But this from you! who, as I hear, saved a ship's crew and passengers, and risked your own dear life so nobly!' she said with tenderness and pathos.

He glanced up at her, but could not tell if she returned his gaze, her eyes seemed so to wander.

'What would you have me say?' he asked her dubiously.

'Oh, Ralph, you'd think me fast, or I could say much more,' she said in gentlest tones of melting tenderness. 'What I now say I could not tell to any man I know: Ralph Osborne, I adore you for your noble conduct! Now, am I not fast?'

'She *has* lost the cast,' thinks he, 'and seems to gaze into my very soul!'

* * * * * * *

Another waltz struck up.

'Look, look! how perfect is their movement!' one and all exclaimed; and even Tabitha, when off her guard, was heard to say, 'What lovely waltzers!'

Ralph liked to think that yielding pliancy of form,—that fascination born of raptured clasp and perfect *accord* must spring from a *Spirituelle* which, stealing around his senses, took complete possession of him.

The music ceased.

'How changed her manner now!' thinks he; 'how quiet and how nice! She knows my thoughts are far away!'

Chapter XV.

'Out, damned spot! out, I say!'—Shakespeare.

'How now, Lanky?' asked St. Peter Gallwood of St. Obadiah Lank-heart Mole, at a side-table where Sternites had congregated. St. Peter and St. Luke Meekface were old chums. Lanky, being Vice-Chairman of the Vortex, carried his head very high indeed. Cards were never touched by the Sternites, being much too near the devil, they said. Fid-fad Lukewarm and Lanky took very sweet counsel together, and grew, if not fat, very rich. Fid-fad was not a bad sort; but Lanky spoilt him by trying to make square things round, and round things square! And the inhabitants of Undone city found it out; but there was no help for it, for they could do nothing!

'How now, Lanky, doth the servant of His master "take"?'

'Take!' wheezed Lanky; 'verily, no; but the "thing" will, I doubt not.'

'We must have the Marquis,' put in St. Luke sternly. 'Doth he know how well "Backaway" hath taken? Praised be God, it hath indeed!'

('*In*,' I breathed.)

'Ah, how the Lord hath raised John Fleasum! The new "football" is to be named "Fleasaway," after his servant, and a comely, righteous name it seemeth.'

'Well, my boys,' cried jolly old John Fleasum, joining them; 'not tripping the light fantastic, eh? Who has seen the Marquis,' asked he beamingly, 'about my little pet scheme for relieving this jaded Old Countree of its superabundant population, eh? Ha! ha! ha! ha!'

'I fear the soul of the Marquis is greatly against the project,' said Lanky. 'I told him each jolly Old Countree labourer should be supplied with "Tracts for the Soul," according to the Prospectus; if not,' whined he resignedly, 'with "Tracts of Soil," and—'

'What!' cried Fid-fad ingenuously; 'will they not get "Tracts of Soil," then?'

Now, as everybody knew, Fid-fad was the Secretary. He had a sort of honest carriage; and Fid-fad could, in his way, be nasty and mischievous. They looked aghast!

There was no land in Fleasaway,—that is, for Dupes. And therefore Lanky rose up in their midst, and straightway said, 'Tracts of Soil are to be given in,—if they can be found, and if

the Lord prospers the "undertaking" with His abundant blessing!' He added benignly, and with much self-complacency, 'And it is not for short-sighted mortals like ourselves to too diligently inquire whether "Tracts of Soil" are ever supplied at all.'

'So long,' put in Luke, 'as they be with godly tracts supplied!'

'And question not, oh, ye Saints of the Most High,' touchingly observed Lanky, 'whether it be lawful or no! And, John Fleasum,' added he, addressing the burly Spoiler at his side, 'I would, John, ye were one of us—perhaps ye are, John, in that heart of thine. Then God be praised! Verily, I think ye are!'

John chuckled, and said aside, 'Verily, I think I ain't; and do not mean to be. It'll be a pretty plum to me, I know!'

Addressing the Sternites, Lanky asked, 'Should we not mention John before the Throne?'

And I heard John say aloud, 'Why don't yer "toss" about it?'

'Toss!' all cried, aghast; 'about the Throne, too!—toss about being mentioned! Oh, John, we fear for thee,—yea, verily!'

'Where's Todigrab?' asked John.

'Toadying the Marquis, I b'lieve,' said Fid-fad.

There was a rustling sound above their heads, amongst the sombre overhanging shrubs. They all looked up. From out the darkness came a Voice which made them quake, 'His hours are numbered!'

Again there was a quivering in the leaves; then silent they became. All stood aghast, and shook.

'Oh, 'tis the Lord! I saw His clouds descending!' cried St. Peter.

'Nay, but the Voice!' gasped St. Luke, with feeble utterance.

'What did it say?' asked Lanky, endeavouring to assume a cheerful air.

'As though you didn't know!' said burly John. 'But does not Todigrab belong unto the Lord? If so, what matters it whether he be taken or left?' he asked, with a half smile, twirling his fingers at a demi-right angle.

'Oh, no,' said several voices. 'His hair's too short; besides he is an Israelite!'

'In whom is much guile indeed,' said St. Peter self-complacently, bearing in mind the Voice, and shrugging his shoulders, as, with his face between his hands, he leant himself forward.

'Are not the Israelites the Lord's?' asked John. 'Well, but he's clever, and acts so on the square.'

'How's that?' asked St. Peter.

'He buys it,' replied John curtly.

'Buys a square! then which?' screamed the Saint.

'Why, Foreigner's—'

'What for?' asked St. Peter.

John (aside), 'Dull Puritans!—and yet not so dull! ha, ha!' (aloud), '*Who* for, you mean?—the Lord, I s'pose!'

All voices, 'Whose Lord? not ours. The House of Lords, perhaps?'

'No, no,' said John. 'Well, say the House of Commons! To gain a seat therein, and thus prove useful to the Lord thereby!' (aside) 'Ha, ha!'

All voices, 'He shall be mentioned!'

John Fleasum (quietly), 'He doesn't want to be.'

'Yea, verily,' said Peter; 'what say ye, brother Luke?'

'He isn't one of us,' said Luke. 'I don't see how we can, unless,' continued he, goggling his eyes round towards his brethren, 'unless he puts us up to "a good thing," like unto "Backaway" or "Fleasaway," provided it doth take;' and here he grinned knowingly.

'Doth take or no,' said John, 'I'm on,—I'll make it take.'

'John shall be mentioned!' cried Lanky solemnly.

Chorus of voices: 'Doth take or no, he shall be mentioned; we're on, we're on!'

'Then here's success to the donor of "the Potter's Field"!' said burly John, flourishing a glass of sound old port high in the air.

'Ho, ho!' cried all the voices; 'you're joking, John!'

'Well, then, the People shouldn't joke,' cried John, at the same time regarding the Saints with earnest gaze.

'Why, that is Scripture, John. "The Potter's Field!" ho, ho!'

'It's blasphemy! "The Potter's"—' and Peter stopped, then quivered forth, 'Why call it the—'

'Something about blood, I think. But what's the odds? That don't hurt you and me! ha, ha!'

Chorus of Sternite voices: 'That don't hurt you and me! ha, ha!'

I now left these gentlemen to themselves, not understanding at all what they meant; but if they understood each other, I suppose it was all right. It seemed, however, to savour of Bones, and Sighs, and Hearts, and Tears, and Desolated Homes! I flitted into the grand saloon.

Chapter XVI.

'A little stealing is a dangerous part,
But stealing largely is a noble art;
'Tis mean to rob a henroost, or a hen,
But stealing THOUSANDS makes us—gentlemen.'

I NEVER intrude upon solitude, or I would, I rather think, have beaten Ralph at his own game. Lady Beatrice was solitary now. It would not have been fair, or else I would have been her big watch-dog one minute, another her spaniel, while in the next her Newfoundland, and run into the water when she threw sticks and stones in to me, and after that a wet, dank, Spectral leaf for her to tread upon. I might, too, have got dry again,—Ralph never thought of that,—and become, oh, ecstasy! a gauzy, Spectral framework, made for seraphic beings, and with scarce a breath of wind have soared aloft upon her chimney-top, and falling on her hearth, heard her call to Carlo, and seen,—ah! And who knows? she might have stooped and picked me up,—oh, transport too profound! Me in her tiny hand! to feel her warm, unconscious breath encircling my airy form! 'twould be too much! But, sir, I only was a Spectre! Now, will you pity me? Consider for one moment *my* aspirations!

* * * * * * *

At a card-table in an ante-room sat four antiquated dames, upright, placid, and proper. Whist had been their game, and now it was Scandal. After a while they came to the cause of Lady Beatrice's sudden fright, which they attributed to, 'Oh, dear, it's quite impossible to say!'

Near them sat the Lady Teresa Ogilvie, with a quiet, demure-looking creature next. She had remarkable features, long tapered fingers, and—according to Ralph's observation to Lady Gertrude the moment he saw her—an unsound mind. Her smiles, which were rare, extended but one inch around her well-shaped nose, her eyes could look as dangerously as her niece's, and they had attracted Ralph's notice from the first.

Flirtations having become the rage, never-dying whispers first attract, then irritate the ear. Daughters lounge about with mammas, or without them,—generally with others. It grows late, and some are receiving marching orders. Couples saunter about, hot and thirsty looking.

Ralph listens, but hears nothing. That shriek is ringing

still, and his mind is ill at rest. As he is asking himself, 'What could it be?' he starts.

'If national honour is nothing,' says a voice, which he at once recognises as Harry Somers' in its most excited tones; 'if thieves and rascality are to be—the go! if, in a word, it is to be a race for wealth,' continues he in louder tones, 'whether you will or no—' Somers pauses for a few moments to survey the occupants of the room; he had been indulging much too freely for him; it required but little now to excite him beyond human control. He looked like a madman. His ventures had all gone wrong: Beloved Silver Mine, Backaway Loan, Southville Empirical Land Company, Metal Mountain Debentures,—all, all had gone,—had dropped to irrecoverably low quotations, and Harry Somers was in debt!

'*Thirty-four millions*,' cried he, boiling with wrath and indignation, '*are now represented by* FOUR!—millions sterling, too, which the people have been inveigled into subscribing by—*this Public Man!*' he pronounced these words in tones of biting scorn and utter contempt; 'rather call him the Modern Financial Nero, who lies in wait, spreading terror far and wide by the celebrity of his name!'

'He'th not a public man, Thomerth; he'th kicked out of Carpetminthter!' said a well-known voice.

All eyes were turned towards the speaker. 'Hurrah!' said one, 'Hurrah!' cried another, and it soon became general.

When it had subsided, I heard Somers again: 'If shameless Criminals,' pursued he, twisting his herculean frame into every species of contortion, 'are to be the heroes of society, the men looked up to, fawned upon, and adored, there's but one of two things for a man like me to do. I cannot stoop to outwit the clever rogue; but,' said he, his eyes glaring fiercely, while he raised his fist, as though to fell some one to the ground, 'I can strike the assassin's blow, for Revenge I will have!'

The effect of this sudden ebullition was electric. Many made a move to go; others persisted in staying,—several pretty girls among the number. The white scar now shone clear and bright upon his crimson Hot-Countree forehead. Fullheart, who had accompanied him, endeavoured to remonstrate with him. 'Oh, Fullheart, my good fellow, it's no use talking; you and I are not made alike. My good fellow, Fullheart, it's no use!'

'But surely, Somers, you do not think it more becoming, or gentlemanly either, to destroy that which you can never restore, than to endeavour to outwit and ruin him! There must be roguery in all societies, and robbery too. Look around! thievery

is winked at—allowed, too, by the highest in the land. Where the boundary of thievery ends and the infinitely and undefinably vague line of strict honour is acknowledged to commence has never yet been decided. Do you undertake so delicate a task?'

'Strict honour!' roared the Bungaland soldier, 'strict and thorough unappeasable deviltry, you mean! Oh, Fullheart, don't, don't, for God's sake! my good fellow. Recollect,' he continued, in a burst of unbridled fury, 'I'm mad! you told me so just now. I shall do it,—I know I shall do it!' he hoarsely cried.

A cold shudder ran around the room. Fullheart endeavoured once more to reason with him.

'You hoped to rob somebody when you gambled, and it ended in their robbing you,' said he, regarding him steadfastly.

'I never was a "bear" in my life,' said he, in a dry and husky voice, so unlike his former loud and tremulous one. 'I never was a "bear,"' pursued he, in sorrowful tones, which gradually culminated in a second burst of passionate wrath, 'of unblushing Swindles which I foisted upon an honest, a simple, an unsuspecting public! I have been a "bull" of HIS crafty, behind-the-scenes, cruel misrepresentations! He has ruined me,—my mother,—and another is yet to follow! I will be even with such *a thing!* I will trample its life out, as I would a worm's!' Somers paced the room, gasping for breath.

Taking his hand kindly in his, the old man said quietly, 'And repent it all your life.'

'And all the next, and beyond that, so that I do it in this!' shouted Somers; then suddenly reflecting, he continued, 'But I'll not repent it! I'll glory in it! I'm mad, you know!'

He laughed like a child.

'You'll be hanged if you do.'

'Hanged! hanged!—me hanged!' He exploded with rage, his agitation was inconceivable. 'Do they hang mad men?' he screeched; 'then I'm ready.' He made three short, hurried steps, then stopped, while the old man said soothingly:

'You're excited, my boy; come, let's take a walk. You'll be calmer when—'

'When I've murdered him—not before!' said the Bungaland soldier slowly.

'Calm enough, my boy, for they would hang you. Why not write and expose *the thing*, as you call it, to the public? Why murder him?'

'They would not print what I would write,' said he, with a look of sad but proud dejection; 'and if I got it printed, they'd have me up for LIBEL! Well, *I wouldn't run away!*'

'You must veil it well.'

'Veil the devil! I'll veil none!' said he fiercely. 'I'll get the devil's help to—'

A tall figure, closely followed by another, crossed the room.

'You may think it becoming, sirs, to be frittering away your moments in discussing subjects, which,—none of you comprehending,—yet the sanctity of which you have dared to invade!' Lady Teresa stopped. She was paler than before. The scene was like a tableau. Tall, majestic, and handsome, with all traces of a smile wanting, and stern in her gaze upon the soldier-Hercules, whom she now faced, her action was as tragic as her demeanour was unbending. An ashy paleness now overspread her blanched features, her eyes grew unnaturally bright, as, raising her long, tapered fingers, she proceeded, 'But know, if you have no reverence for matters which are incomparably beyond you, others feel acutely the agony your wanton remarks have provoked!'

All were taken aback. She was about leaving the room, but Ralph caught sight of Geraldine's eyes, glittering more dangerously and fascinatingly than ever. She was raising both hands on high,—in the next moment Ralph had stayed her aunt's departure. Not knowing in the least who she was,—for he had heard but little of his kinswoman,—he stepped before her. 'Madam!' exclaimed he, 'say, what have we done? Maddening scenes, of which you can form no conception, fully account for his impassioned words! No ill intent was manifest,—we're too well bred for that—too honest, rather! Stay,—don't go, I implore!' Ralph stood aside; his face was flushed as he gazed upon his friend. Her tragic form had turned. She smirked the quarter-smile, and left the ante-room.

Chapter XVII.

> 'So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear,
> Farewell remorse; all good to me is lost:
> Evil, be thou my good.'—Milton.

'My dear departed' (could this be meant for me?), 'come into the corridor; something to see.—Yours always, Harry.'

Why will people leave their letters about? I at once made for the Ghost's Walk, where, but a little while before, Birdie lay, supported upon Ralph's knee, her long hair escaping over his breast and falling in such lovely tresses, he, with mind equally disordered, whispering sweet 'I-don't-know-what's' into her ear.

Passing, on my way, through another dimly-lighted one, I saw Geraldine crouching down in abject terror at Ralph's side, and heard her give a piercing scream, while, in the next moment, she fell heavily to the ground.

'Well,' I heard Ralph mutter, 'the women are making the running to-night.'

Her aunt and keeper—so she was—had passed the two, and she had thanked him for his little speech.

'Mad!' had oozed from his throat ere they had gone very far. He scarce had heard it himself, but Geraldine's quick ear had caught the sound. With dreadful mien she had confronted him; what could he say! 'Fiend! Murderess!' he pictured her; and as she gazed upon him with that wrathful, tragic look, he conjured up a thousand horrid fancies. Fascinated, he would not break the spell, but dwelt on some one else's beauteous, precious innocence:

> Her tender, playful, tiny ways;
> An honest thought in each fond gaze.

Scarce noticing the quivering lip, he waited; she broke the silence.

'Had I pronounced the curse which, rankling in my bosom, trembled on my lips, I should have stooped to the level of common natures. Silence is eloquence more telling and punishment more rare to natures such as yours. I forgive!' she added, with a guttural rising, 'but Geraldine Ogilvie never forgets!'

And 'young nineteen' had extended to him her ungloved hand, and had pronounced a threat, a pardon, and a curse, all in a breath, while he had been comparing her, point for point, with his idol, as he would his hunters. 'Madness is a thing of degree,' he had felt inclined to utter; he didn't. It was awkward; he tried to rally, and didn't either.

> 'Nothing bad lasts long.'

Ah, sir, life is so short! Yours, not mine;—mine is never ending—or I would tell you to the full of everything that happened afterwards. How that the thunder rumbling in the distance had now burst o'er their heads, and Geraldine was paralysed! She who, only the moment before, had been so haughty and so unbending, had little dreamt of this! and now her aunt came up to lead her away—she telling Ralph Osborne that her poor niece, when but a child, had seen her favourite nurse struck down beneath a tree by lightning, and ever since, a storm alone had dreaded. How that her scream, still resounding in the air, Fred Stanley came running wildly in their midst, exclaiming, 'Oh,

Othborne, come and thee! Thomerth hath killed Thervill Grab! Todigrab ith dead, they thay!' How that Ralph saw Somers walking across the saloon in a calm, defiant manner, and then stand still and cry in triumphant tones, 'Hurrah! hurrah! I've done it; Todigrab's no more; now for the gallows!' How that Slasher's stalwart form was most conspicuous among the excited throng, looking as though he would say, 'Touch him, a dozen, if you dare!' How that all the county people looked upon it as a judgment direct from Heaven! How that Somers had not sought Todigrab, the lines he wrote to Stanley being couched in his usual style, alluding to Stanley's *departing* 'fortnightly differences.' How that, he wishing to show the youth the shrubs, Todigrab walked in while they were quietly so engaged, he having already cast longing eyes on these possessions of the Marquis (one of his greatest dupes), with a view to supplying sundry green-houses at his new mansion. How that the Demon of Hate had, in a moment, seized the young Bungaland soldier, and, his face lit up with demon's fury, poor Stanley feeling powerless, he had felled him to the ground. Beside himself, and mad with drink, he had seized his helpless victim, and in another moment had wrung his neck!

'I would not undo it for worlds,' said the Soldier-Hercules to his young companion who stood helpless by his side. . . . .

Stanley had left, and the giant paced the corridor alone. There was no nervousness about him; no trembling in his hand as, stooping, he examined the shrubs which, but a short time ago, his victim had been envying.

'I knew,' I heard him whisper amid the solemn silence, 'twas in me!' and then he took breath. 'I am so glad I've done it.'

A weird, strange look yet hovered o'er his features. Death lay at his feet! he looked defiant, reckless—towering aloft, in sympathy with the soul within, untortured by the withering contemplation of countless hoards wrung from the slender means of widows, of orphans, of maidens, and of old men!

* * * * * * *

Except that this one had a fiery, desperate countenance—except that this one's bosom heaved quickly, while his erect form stood forth in fearless outlines above the beauteous plants and shrubs which perforce had been the guiltless spectators of his wild, ungovernable rage—one could well have imagined, but for the tragic spectacle at the foot of that old ivy-tree in the Ghost's Walk that fatal morning, that nothing had occurred to mar the character of the scene! that no fierce passions had been at work,—so immovably calm had the man become!

Ralph hurried along. High in the air went a Sternite, as though he had been a dog; the Soldier-Hercules shouting as he flung him,

'I'm sent to avenge the fallen—the orphan and the widow! What is your life but a curse upon God's earth? No peace on earth, but a sword!'

Lank and forlorn fell the Saint, to the consternation of the band, breaking a violoncello to pieces, besides seriously damaging the ophicleide, himself, and a couple of violins. The other Sternites falling back to look after their wounded brother, Somers and Slasher walked quietly away.

It was a dreadful moment for the Marquis, however, who arrived some ten minutes after.

'Ralph, my dear boy,' said he, in a husky, broken voice, 'where is he? He must be detained. I trust to you, Ralph.'

And Ralph said, 'Ah, would it had fallen upon another!'

'My boy, the murdered man's my guest; the sacred laws of hospitality must ever be respected. Oh, why encourage such fearful demons? Go, go, my boy!'

And the old man broke down with grief and excitement.

Ralph, who was quite ready for a scrimmage the moment before, grasped the proffered hand and hastened away.

Chapter XVIII.

'Farewell, happy fields,
Where joy for ever dwells! Hail, horrors, hail!'—Milton.

All night long Somers and Slasher were out in the pelting rain on the Bluffshire moors.

'Ah,' thought Ralph as he went on his fruitless errand, 'how selfish love makes me! I can scarcely bring my mind to realise anything; and they on the wolds, too, and I not sharing their fate!'

Soaked to the skin, flushed, and with an aching pain across his brow, he returned without finding any traces of his friends, groping his way amongst the solemn pine-trees. All had now left the ball-room, but he had to pass close by the marquee which covered in the ancient court. With no hat, and with his thin evening dress-clothes saturated, he stumbled about in the dark, dejected and miserable. The wind and rain were blinding, nor could he as yet see the faintest glimmer of a light from the Castle. Presently he emerged, and stood by the marquee, against the canvas wall of which he had fallen.

'Hark!' I heard him suddenly exclaim, 'do dead men speak?'

He was alone and within a yard of a corpse! Trembling from head to foot he stooped against the canvas dividing him from the ghost's corridor, within an inch of the man who had met with so tragical a fate. Thoughts of her whose lifeless form he had lifted up from that same spot now crowded on his excited fancy. Amid the thick darkness he asked aloud, '*Did you say that?*' Then looking up, the blood freezing in his veins, he raised his hands over his head as though to shield himself from some object in the air. Nothing, however, could he hear but the wind moaning in fitful gusts, and the ceaseless rain, each drop as it fell upon his hot cheeks seeming to reason with and upbraid him. 'Vampyre!' one seemed to call him. 'Spawn of the Vortex!' bespattered another, 'drip, drip, with others' life blood!'

Trembling violently, he cried aloud, 'Do dead men preach their own condemna—' and stopped short, the lightning flashing out forked and lurid. Between the peals of thunder which burst above his head there came, borne on the wind across the wolds that wild December morning, so like that other voice, but in accents more measured and startling, while weird, solemn strains of music sounded in the air, the words, 'God stays long, but strikes at last;' and agonising shrieks, as of victims, rose high above the wintry blast, mingled with hollow shouts of laughter.

* * * * * * *

'Where shall we go?' asked the Viscount of Ralph, the morning after the ball.

'*Où vous voulez*,' replied the other carelessly; 'to Bleak Moor, if you like.'

Bleak Moor skirted the sea. It was soon reached.

'I hope he will get clear off somewhere,' said Ralph, as they urged their horses into a gallop.

For some little time Reginald was moodily silent. Presently he said,

'Ralph, you have a Speculative Account open?'

'Yes,' replied Ralph; 'but I'm going to close it immediately upon my return—immediately.'

'Gambling is fast proving Trememdon's curse,' said the Viscount bitterly, his handsome, noble features looking tragic in their deep melancholy; 'how I rue the hour when Maxwell first entered my father's house!' and he became greatly agitated. 'Why, my father's like a madman at times!' pursued he, flushing and turning pale by turns.

And Ralph exclaimed, 'Oh, God!' and sighed heavily.

Returning by eleven o'clock, they saw a hearse, in the distance, coming up the hill from Old Trememdon village. Giving Ralph a significant nod, Reginald put spurs to his horse, and they gallopped to the lodge gates before it entered, nor looked behind them once all the way to the Castle. They found the great hall full of people. Excitement and agitation were depicted on every countenance. Saints talked with sinners, yet nothing could be heard distinctly. It much resembled the Vortex in a 'panic.'

'What the devil's up now?' said Ralph to his friend. He saw Fullheart talking with the Marchioness, who was in tears. The Marquis stood by her side reading a telegram.

'Oh, Othborne! my dear Othborne!' vociferated Freddy, 'Undone Thity ith all in flameth, at leath Todi'th offithe ith; and all hith vaulth and thellarth have thunk into the earth, and a volcano with thulphur and brimthtone hath thprung up inthtead! And, Ralph, the more water they pump on, the higher the flameth rithe. It all happened, too, the very moment Todi was thmathed! ain't it dreadful?'

Telegram after telegram came from Money Street confirming the news. Grab Brothers, in their haste to be rich, had built upon an insecure foundation, so some said, and that they had been repeatedly warned by their architect. This may or may not have been the case; the fact remained that suddenly, without a note of warning, all the spoils they had amassed, including gold, bank-notes, bills, bonds, and other valuables, became as things that were not, and were swallowed in a Vortex of flame and smoke that roared and crackled in a ceaseless whirl.

How it was that upon the approach of any human being with a bucket of water in his hand, sulphur and stones, accompanied by hollow belching sounds, were emitted more violently, or that the catastrophe occurred at the identical moment of the murder of Todigrab, no one could say. Some said that his spirit haunted the place at night to guard the treasures sunk below; others that he had taken them all away with him to the bottomless pit There was so much confusion of ideas upon the subject, for it was all conjecture, although it eventually transpired in a some what remarkable manner.

At last, finding that it did not spread like ordinary fires, the inhabitants got used to it and let it alone; and beyond darting an occasional puff of brimstone into the faces of passers-by, to remind them of its power, it ceased to annoy them.

All agreed that it was a judgment; and, terrible and appalling though it was, many, very many, thanked God for it.

At the same moment, too, the new house he was building fell in with a tremendous crash, but as it was night, fortunately no one was hurt.

* * * * * * *

'Come to see me in Birdie's room—the dear child knows nothing; don't mention a word.' Obeying this note to the letter, Ralph was soon with the Marchioness.

Chapter XIX.

'Man's love is of man's life a thing apart:
'Tis woman's whole existence.'—Byron.

'Nobody loves as I love—nobody, not even Ralph! Ah, nobody ever could love as I love my own darling Ralph! Perhaps some day, when a scattering of hopes, or a blighting of somebody's existence by a sudden stroke of fortune, comes to try me, and he finds out what I would go through for him, he may learn to love me.' And as Birdie reclined upon her couch the morning after the ball, thinking these thoughts, she looked pale, and worn, and melancholy.

As Ralph ascended the staircase to go to her room and watched the excitement and turmoil in the great hall below, he unconsciously muttered, 'Oh, to take her from this cursed spot—her, my more than everything; my hope here and evermore! Is there an evermore? But, ah, to grasp the living reality! to take her away, and be never again parted!'

He found Birdie in tears, and as the Marchioness had whispered previously to leaving him, taking Emma Louise and Lady Gertrude away with her, 'You shall not be interrupted, my dear boy; a man who so nobly, and in such a way, too, risked his life, is worthy of every confidence and affection!' I left them for two good hours.

And the room was still; and when I returned he was saying, 'Nothing could ever recompense for that ethereal passion,—ineffable flame, which no money can purchase, nor ruin destroy; which is rich without riches, and true to the grave!—then more and more true;—for yonder, ay, ever it deeper becomes, as age succeeds age, and Sphere follows Sphere!—remote Space is traversed, each phase becomes known,—warm, life-giving Love abides, ever the same!'

And Birdie's eyes were wet still, but they were not the same

kind of tears, though they did flow fast; and I'm afraid they looked very foolish; but then there was no one to see them, so what did it matter? I don't think it did a bit.

And suddenly she began to laugh, for Ralph had said that small as her tiny hands were, they were not smaller than her little feet; and she asked him, how did he know indeed? and then he said, 'I do know though, Birdie darling.' I think he said 'darling;' I'm not sure, but it does not matter. I know he didn't like the word as a rule. And she started up suddenly, for she had been reclining on her couch, and he had been leaning over her. 'Why, Ralph, what can you mean?' asked she, with a little blush.

'If you must know, Birdie, many and many a time have I paced outside your room and looked at your little boots as they stood—'

'Then I sha'n't put them there any more.'

'And kissed them *inside* again and again—'

'Then I won't put them—'

'And you have the *teaniest mite* of a little foot—'

'Oh, Ralph, how foolish of you—'

'But it was in the days when—when—'

'When what, Ralph?' asked she, in a burst of merry laughter.

'When I—'

'Well, do go on, old boy.'

'When I hadn't you to—'

And I left them again, as I couldn't comprehend a word. At the expiration of three-quarters of an hour I found them on the very best of terms with each other; Ralph having learnt nothing whatever as to the cause of her sudden fright in the corridor, and Birdie having become quite satisfied, notwithstanding reports—and Ralph would have liked to have found out the fellow who spread them, if it had been a man—that if he could only have been certain of seeing her alone for even five minutes the night before, he would have been by her side.

Chapter XX.

'The ruling passion, be it what it will,
The ruling passion conquers reason still.'—Pope.

Fern gathering was lawful; clouds had cleared off, and on the afternoon after the ball the beautiful Vale of Lovely was proposed for a picnic. There would be a bright moon; therefor

cares and forebodings were exchanged for hampers; and flirtations, which had been so unpropitiously broken off, were to be renewed with greater vigour than ever.

As the party were about starting, I saw Ralph walking with Geraldine. The girls had been complimenting him on the progress he had made in Lady Teresa's good opinion—a thing so rare—and telling him that she was fabulously wealthy. The conversation was interrupted by the approach of Tabitha Gallwood, who had, so it seemed, conceived a sudden and unaccountable liking for Ralph. Thinking to make herself agreeable to Geraldine first by way of preliminaries, she all at once accosted her in a most endearing manner. This, however, was the signal for his departure. As he left them I heard him mutter,

> 'When "dear" and "love" they one another call,
> Take swift depart, nor wait the coming squall.'

I saw no ferns gathered. I cannot call to mind whether the Saints went, but I should not have been surprised to hear that they did not; for I do recollect hearing St. Peter address the head of Trememdon's house as 'my noble Marquis,' and telling him about the famous danseuse, Kitty Trippit, whom he had engaged to perform at the new music-hall about to be opened in close proximity to the Vortex, as a substitute for the pernicious habit of gambling lately acquired by members and 'authorised clerks' belowstairs, and to afford recreation and brace the jaded nerves of Brokers, Principals, Jobbers, and clerks, during the intervals between slaughtering 'bulls' and pickling 'bears,' and showing him a letter which he had just received from her (under cover to X. Z.).

'We shall not go ourselves, my noble Marquis,' said St. Peter; 'indeed, we are getting Tracts printed in vast quantities ready to distribute amongst our weaker brethren out of the Lord. It is like to "take" well enough,' added he, looking up with a knowing grin at the Marquis; 'would my noble Marquis care to invest? it will be on the limited—'

'What may the titles of your Tracts be?' asked the Marquis incredulously.

'"Shrieks from Pisgah" is the name of one,' said St. Peter. 'Also "David in the Damp Sheets,"' put in Lanky sternly. 'Or "The Tottering Tinker,"' volunteered St. Luke. '"The Spectral Panic" is a lovely one,' urged Fid-fad, who was as yet but slightly imbued; 'it refers to the millennium beautifully; it would be devoured by all eagerly—indeed, it would "take"!'

I began to think this insulting, but the Lord love you, sir,

Fid-fad did not mean anything. I thought, however, at the time that 'Ye Vampyres !' by Me, would cap them all, for they *should* be circulated !

Now it was St. Peter's evil genius which had prompted him to mention this subject to the Marquis that morning; for from that hour, so far as *his Name* was concerned, Fleasaway was doomed.

Chapter XXI.

'Not she with trait'rous kiss her Saviour stung,
Not she denied Him with unholy tongue;
She, while apostles shrank, could danger brave,
Last at His cross and earliest at His grave.'

E. S. Barrett.

Now I saw that Slasher was returned and in his right mind, and the Marchioness, Ralph, Freddy, and he consulted together; the Marquis, having tried to bear up, had completely failed.

'You see, my dear boys,' said she, 'we must keep him alive.' She felt as much for Somers as though he had been her son, though keen was her anguish at what had occurred.

'He refuses point blank to go to my father's,' said Slasher. Poor fellow ! he persisted in saying all along that he heard voices in the air.'

'What did they say?' eagerly inquired Ralph.

'I cannot tell,' replied Slasher; 'but I myself plainly saw an unsheathed sword amongst the thunder-clouds, with Justice inscribed above it amidst a dazzling brightness which, flashing all around, nearly blinded me; and I heard a voice, high and clear—'

'What did it say?' asked Ralph excitedly.

'"Righteous Heaven !"'

'Anything more?'

'"Tremble, guilt, for thou shalt find !"'

'Tho did I—tho did I,' said Freddy; 'and then I heard thome more—'

'Was it "Yet his bolt shall quickly fly"?' asked Slasher.

'Yeth, yeth. Did Thomerth hear it?'

'He did, but took little notice.'

'How was that?' gently inquired the Marchioness.

'O, he was all too much taken up with joy at having rid the world of a villain !'

'Ah! I do not wonder,' said she, with a deep sigh.

'I mutht thee Thomerth,' said the good-natured boy.

'We'll all go down together,' added Ralph.

When the Marchioness heard this, she said, 'May God be with you all! but he should be advised not to keep too near Trememdon now,' and left them to themselves.

'Harry persists in staying near Trememdon,' whispered Slasher to Ralph, 'to watch over HER!'

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Although many a bosom among that Christmas party felt an inward aching, all strove to throw off the sense of gloom which oppressed and seemed to menace them at every point. As the evening approached, the Marquis rallied, and had still a kindly word for every blushing maiden, shedding a lustre wherever he went; and hearts which were warm before became more cordial and hearty as the evening ripened into night.

The Marchioness bore up equally well, casting gleams of joy and brightness in her train; pleasing without effort, gladdening unconsciously, she subdued and endeared hearts unused to woman's wholesome sway, leading each and all to feel the near approach of that bright morn, which so many hundred years before had ushered in the birth of HIM, around whom, despite all subtleties of logic and wilfulness of human nature, many sad hearts clustered; and who then traced out, in HIS deep, loving nature, in HIS noble, untrammelled purity of essence, divested of every colouring of misconception, priestcraft, and idolatry,—the joys ineffable of Paradise!

CHAPTER XXII.

'Away with your fictions of flimsy romance,
Those tissues of falsehood which folly has wove;
Give me the mild beam of the soul-breathing glance,
Or the rapture which dwells on the first kiss of love.'—BYRON.

SLASHER, Ralph, and Stanley left the Christmas party early. They reached old Betty's to find their friend gone. He had left an hour before with a gipsy-woman, whom Ralph and Reginald had met in the morning on Bleak Moor, and who had then informed them of the fugitive's whereabouts. Putting a sovereign into Betty's hand, and getting into a disguise old Peggy had brought with her, they had departed within half an hour of the arrival of the officers of justice, whom Betty had detained as long as she had dared, for they were in no very good humour.

'And I'll trust old Peggy to keep the gentleman—and he is a gentleman,' said Betty, dropping a tear—'quite safe; she knows every inch of the county. Oh, it's a dreadful thing! terrible—terrible! May God help and guard him!' she said, with a fresh flow of tears.

I saw the young men grasp each other's hands in silence, and Ralph handed the poor old creature a parcel containing a warm woollen cloak, saying, 'Here, Betty, for the winter; please say not a word—and here, Betty,' he said, putting another sovereign into her extended hand, which he warmly shook; 'good-bye, Betty; I hope—you must tell me if it doesn't fit, you know.'

Not waiting to hear more he left, followed by his two friends; it was all so quietly and so quickly done that they were wending their way back to the Castle in the bright moonlight, before the poor old creature had recovered from her surprise, and that was just what Ralph wanted.

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Ah, what heavenly sounds were those? I had regained the Castle; Ralph and Birdie were alone, not in the Castle turret, nor in the snow-clad ravine, but in the Castle library, Ralph's old room. And I looked!—her picture had been replaced. I heard her murmur, 'But supposing, dear Ralph—oh, I cannot say the words—but I have often thought of those big, curling waves; what should I have done then? How I trembled as I watched you, and beckoned to you from the shore!'

'If they really had devoured me, you mean. Well, that would have made no difference, my child, for you were ever mine, and ever must have been! Ages might roll, and worlds might pass away, but what are worlds, or ages? We should have met; our souls were ever approaching towards each other! Time—a year or two at most—and then, my Birdie, we should have mingled our souls in one!'

I left the room; I liked them so to be alone. The door was just ajar. Birdie was at the harp, Ralph resembling thousands of joyous sunbeams all melted into one, and she the bright reflection of them all. And then she sang, and as I listened I had to pinch my old Spectral limbs to force myself to calmness. I own it was difficult, oh, sir, you've heard—oh, no, you never have heard Birdie!

But picture, in fancy only, the faintest summer's breath, the tiniest fluttering in the gauzy sky,—a zephyr's whispering trill stealing from balmy Southern skies,—the wee-est note of sound, prolonged and floating in the azure atmosphere; and then,—a swelling thrill of melody which, bursting on the unexpectant ear,

would vibrate till the heart would overflow with rapturous bliss, the while her melting cadences would rend and soften the fibres of stout, manly bosoms, and—what of Ralph's?

'The heart, like a tendril, accustom'd to cling,
Let it grow where it will, cannot flourish alone,
But will lean to the nearest and loveliest thing
It can twine in itself, and make closely its own.'

'But not the refrain, my own one; Moore was not thinking of our loves,' said Ralph earnestly, the moment the last echoes had died away, which I thought so difficult to discover.

Her slave was now reclining upon the ground; his arms were thrown around her dark, flowing skirt; his lips were close to two tiny feet. He moved, and so did I, for suddenly his arms were thrown about her wildly, his head reclined where none had lain before,—his lips so near to hers! He has undone her hair in naughty playfulness; it falls upon her radiant neck and shoulders, imparting life and warmth around.

'Oh, give me *Moore*,' he begged.

'Sit up then, dear old boy, or else I won't.'

('That's right,' I breathed; 'keep the young man in order!')

But neither heeded a bit. Soon she began once more, the sounds proceeding like strains from harp of Æolus:

'Let Fate do her worst; there are relics of joy,
Bright dreams of the past, which she cannot destroy;
Which come in the night-time of sorrow and care,
And bring back the features that joy used to wear.
Long, long be my heart with such memories fill'd!
Like the vase, in which roses have once been distill'd,
You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.'

The last cadences of unearthly music had died away. Ralph had watched his idol from where he had 'sat up' in silent adoration, till the last reverberations of the harp she had touched with such magic thrilling sweetness had wafted their tones in sombre low vibratory resonance, and had then become part of those two breathing, warm, loving natures.

I heard Ralph sigh, as though his heart would burst, and yet he spoke no words. Idly touching the chords, she sang with easy grace the words,

'And hearts, so lately mingled, seem
Like broken clouds—or like the stream—
That smiling left the mountain's brow,
As though its waters ne'er could sever,
Yet, ere it reach the plain below,
Breaks into floods, that part for ever'

Ralph started; he was not prepared for this. I saw him fold his darling in his arms. I saw—I saw—I can't tell what I saw. I wouldn't tell for worlds! I left them. I would have breathed, had I but the courage, 'Good-night, you more than goddess, Birdie! Ralph, good-night!'

Chapter XXIII.

'To Banbury came I—
O profane one!
Where I saw a
Puritane one
Hanging of his cat
On Monday,
For killing of a mouse
On Sunday.'

Now although not only the heads of the noble house of Trememdon, but also their guests, had done all in their power to endeavour to distract their minds from the terrible sense of dread which surrounded them, yet, like the mountain torrent, which, dammed by an accumulation of débris, may be stemmed for a time, is certain to burst forth sooner or later with greater violence than ever, the time soon came when dissembling was no longer possible.

The Marquis sat in his chair broken-hearted. A guest at his Castle had been murdered by another guest. It seemed an event too fearful to realise even now. Sunday had come—for Christmas, ever quiet at Old Trememdon, was gone—and with Sunday came a Sternite conference. Lanky questioned whether it were lawful to attend the Church out of which their fathers had come.

'As from an accursed thing!' added St. Peter. 'Think! might not our souls be greatly endangered thereby?—'tis the Church of the Old Countree, linked with things temporal, things carnal.'

'Things devilish!' urged St. Luke; 'wot ye not we have enough to answer for without? Yea, verily. And, brethren,' continued he, with livid countenance and upturned eye, 'last night I dreamt I heard a voice,—'twas in the clouds! The Avenging Destroyer appeared with Retribution written on his brow! He spoke of "Backaway!" I saw thousands of labourers on a Strand, starving! And some were kneeling, and crying to Heaven for vengeance! And then I seemed to wake. The

Devil was in my house, with the whole of the "Backaway" bonds under his arm, which he had brought for full redemption! and he swore, my brethren, with a great, wicked oath, which shook the house, that he would have his *pound of flesh!* I bade him go to Fleasum—I said 'twas his affair! He said, "Be silent, sir!—I'll search your house!" He said he had got hold of Todi, and was grilling him on a slow fire! He ransacked all—'

'Enough, enough!' all cried; 'to go—or not to go?'

'Let's go, and get the Marquis's great Name!' said Lanky.

'I hate to snivel so,' wheezed St. Peter. 'I am but a poor, weak brother! We'll take Tracts, then, to give to the benighted tenantry of the Marquis.'

'So, so, my boys, for he's a jolly good fellow!' put in burly John.

All the City men went to church, which they regarded, as many do, a theatre, made to shock, transport, or wither with its fire; and, when the play was over, pay the price and go. The Deity must be a Something in their kind estimation, else people wouldn't talk about Him so; else, when dire calamity befell, their quaking limbs would show more boldness! Everything beyond this Something was a myth: might be—who could tell? Why should one proclaim, without he yields his proof? was he privileged, &c.?

Now the Rector, so they had heard, was a novel kind of parson. He enjoyed the world, much as other men, with moderation; and having no sort of assumption, was honest, genial, and true. He paid no greater attention to the young, ardent, tender, and susceptible female members of his congregation—thereby enhancing his reputation by the *kudos* thus acquired—than to the old, decrepit, and weaker members—some said *less*—the younger ones to wit; and these said that they loved him at the bottom of their hearts all the better for it; and it resulted in these looking after and administering to the wants of the others, which was just what the Rector desired.

The tenantry all loved to go and hear him; but he always made allowances for them if they did not, for he knew what hard toil they had in the week-days. He never pressed them; he even encouraged innocent recreations on a Sunday, in which he sometimes joined. But they loved him so they generally went, for they were eager to hear what he had to say.

'I'll read my Master's words,' said he upon this occasion. 'Some of you may decline to have a Master,—may think it cringing even, and beneath you. While in the walks of Art, of

Science, and of Learning, you're too rejoiced to deal out praise where praise is due, yet, in the bright realms of Poetry, of Imagery, of Boundless Love and Truth, of Life beyond this short existence, you would deny His claim to your affection and your homage !'

He paused—he looked around—his face was as a god's. All eyes were fixed upon the man who spoke with such soul and earnestness. *Spirituelle* thrilled every heart. Amid the solemn silence he proceeded.

'My Master said, "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man should lay down his life for his friends; ye are my friends if ye do what I command you."

'There are many ways of laying down one's life for one's friends,' said he. 'Those who toil, wasting heart and brain in their service, are hourly laying down their lives for them, and every act of Love clings to its possessor. Becoming part of his being, its mighty influence renders actions which once appeared formidable easy of performance, and makes that life a charm which before looked black, frowning, and desolate !

'Ever on the look-out to add to his capital of Love, every new act of benevolence increases it.

'Life may pay the forfeit, but what is Life without Love?—that Love which, the passage made, the streamlet waded, continues, with Life fading far, far in the distance, to open up an ever-widening vista of existence ! Why waste the precious hours of life,' he asked, 'without Love? Each sleepless night, and every aching pain, the fruits of self-sacrifice in a noble cause—the cause of Love—*these* are those "commands" by doing which you shall be known as "friends of His."' And he said no more.

The sensation-mongers were satisfied. St. Peter was not.

'Perhapth your thoul requireth it red hot, with brimthtone and pitth and thulphur !' remarked Freddy.

Lanky thought it was lawful for the godly to pass one Sabbath without a sermon.

'But not expedient,' urged St. Peter.

'I verily believe it is,' insisted Lanky; and there was a strife among the Saints. Lanky had no idea of giving up the game of Fleasaway, because the brain which had conceived it, and the hand which would have pushed it forward, if secretly and irresponsibly, yet vigorously, were now paralysed in death. He sighed for the Marquis's Name.

'Don't let us kick up a bobbery and fuss until we get this Name ! I gave away handfuls of Tracts, and relieved my conscience—'

'But whatever your intentions may be,' said Slasher, coming up at the time, 'to the weary, benighted pilgrims of these regions, you should be careful, and not waste such good matter upon persons like myself; here are three which you gave me, innocently, I doubt not,—they are very much at your service. Why not reserve them for Kitty Trippit, when the dancing is over?' continued he, flinging Kitty's rose-tinted, strong-scented note, which some luckless Saint had left lying about, into the midst of the disconcerted Sternites.

Stanley now joined them, and they laughed long and heartily at the bombshell effect of the little discovery.

Now Tabitha had a great curiosity to see the inside of a church of the Old Countree. Against her father's express orders therefore had she gone, arm in arm with Maxwell, to the village church of Old Trememdon. Tabitha had a new bonnet also, one rather in advance of the Trememdon girls' bonnets, and she was particularly desirous of eclipsing them. It was Tabitha's first attendance at a service of the church of the Nation. When the organ began the beautiful prelude 'I will arise,' I heard her say to herself, 'Oh, how dreamy! how beautiful! ah,—so that it enthralls while it lasts! But, ah, now it ceases, what a dreary blank! But, oh, listen to that young man in white! how handsome! oh, what a voice! all in the still silence too—so much more impressive after the tones of the organ have died away! How it steals over my senses! Ah, why was I not born a Churchwoman?'

After a pause, St. Peter confided to Luke that he feared Tabitha's soul was in a very bad way.

'Think, my brother,' said he painfully, 'Tabitha asked her mother, "might she dance?" the night of that carnal delight!'

St. Luke was thereupon immediately shocked, and asked him why he had brought her. Peter replied,

'Maxwell did not tell us there would be so sinful a pleasure as dancing; and there was no holding her in; and, then, to think,' continued he, 'of the Rector having danced *like anybody else!*'

'Ho! ho! truly horrible!' cried all.

'Verily, think ye that Maxwell is sound?' asked St. Peter, in a dubious whine.

'Oh, very!' replied all, in which Fid-fad joined.

'My brothers!' howled St. Peter, 'should we not warn the Marquis about his soul?'

'Not until we get his Name,' replied Lanky imperatively.

'Oh, no! oh, no!' joined in St. Luke, in decided tones.

'Then directly after!' said St. Peter, urged by the recollection of his dream.

'We'll see,' said Lanky; 'we may want it for other "business." Fleasum knows best—ah! here he is!'

It was night; Fleasum was merry. As Todigrab and his money were gone, he had resolved to push 'Fleasaway' on his own account, and get the lion's share of the plunder. He had just finished a third bottle of the Marquis's old port.

'Tol-de-rol-de-liddle-lol-tol-de—hullo, boys!'

'John Fleasum!' said St. Peter solemnly, 'wist ye not that it is the Sabbath, John?'

But John was in a rollicking mood.

'Damn—ahem—how's your—hic—self—my—hic—noble Gall—hic—wood—m'sn't g't toolow—damcrawlers!—ahem—hic—bad—thing—cheerup—hic—howsthe—hic—fineoldboy—hic—Markis—demfine—hic—ahem—fineplaceTmmd'n—hic—dem—ahem—fine! jollyfler—hic—Rect'r—demme—hic—ahemnoendfler!'

John sat down; the Sternites looked from one to the other, and shook their heads.

'Tol-de-rol-de—hic—b'g pard'n—hic—hopey'ralljolly,' continued John, evading the ireful looks cast towards his corner, and, rising from his seat, he began to dance about like a juggler. Fid-fad catching his eye, the two talked aside for a few seconds.

'I fear John's ways are not as our ways,' said St. Peter deploringly to St. Luke. 'What a pity, too! such a fine disciple as he would make! just cut out for a missionary!'

'Stuff—stuff! much more useful here,' said St. Luke; and then continued, in a confidential tone, 'Between you and me, Peter, I verily think he hath a great affection for the Marquis—very!'

'And so hath Walter—very promising is Walter!'

'Come, come, boys!' cried John Fleasum, his ruddy countenance all aglow, 'hic—let's have—hic—nothrbumpr—an—hic—drnk—sccss—"F—flswy!"'

He raised his hands aloft in glee, and danced among the Sternites with terpsichorean agility.

'Oh, John! oh, John! on Sunday night!' cried the weaker brethren.

Had there been an eighth day specially set apart for him, there would have been no restraining John Fleasum—seventh or first, it was all one to him; he rattled on until he was completely tired. Subsiding, eventually, into a roomy arm-chair, he gave vent to little puffs of short and select sentences, such as, 'He's joll—gd fell—her—hic—er,' and 'Toll-lol-lido—' till he fell fast asleep.

Slasher and Stanley had again neared the group. Fid-fad

was exhibiting a full-length portrait of Todigrab to the rapt and admiring gaze of the Sternites. With wonderful simplicity Stanley suddenly exclaimed,

'Why, Othie! that'th not Todigrab!'

'Not Todigrab! how so?' asked Fid-fad hotly.

'Why, of courthe it ain't; thith feller'th got hith handth *in hith own pocketth*, whoever he ith,' said the innocent Freddy.

The silence which followed was simply awful, the only sounds disturbing it proceeding from Fleasum's chair, where, between his heavy breathings, an occasional start, followed by 'tol,' and then 'de rol,' or else 'de rido,' broke in upon the stillness.

The Sternites discussed the probabilities of 'Fleasaway' no more that night, although the Vortex was sadly in want of a good round, plump 'football,' and was beginning to languish without. Freddy Stanley was soon sleeping the sleep of the just; Slasher was not long behind; while Ralph, on retiring for the night, pulled out a note from his pocket, handed him by old Betty on coming out of church. It ran thus:

'Ralph! I love HER! CHRIST loves us all three! I am to GUARD HER!—Yours, H. S.'

After reading it over half a dozen times, Ralph fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'I saw thee weep—the big, bright tear
Came o'er that eye of blue;
And then methought it did appear
A violet dropping dew.'—BYRON.

As I have before intimated, but for the imperative duties in other Spheres, which are constantly calling me away, I should have liked to have given you a comprehensive, as well as an authentic and historical, account of every event just as it happened up to the present year of our Lord one million.

My time is not my own, sir. I will endeavour briefly to trace the course of those events without my notes, which, I regret to say, I have left, with their duplicates, in some remote part of Space. They are safe enough, and, should occasion ever require, can be referred to. I know the planet well, and they are in the very best of keeping; 'tis not a question of Space, but Time, and I hope to jog on pretty well without them.

About six months after the breaking up of the Trememdon Christmas party, Lady Beatrice Violet Playfair, and her cousin

Maude Mountedgecumbe Playfair Trevosa, who had recently arrived from Fernland, were conversing together in a bower of the Castle grounds, commanding an extensive and lovely view of the cliffs and crowning woods, with the sea in the background.

Lady Beatrice was trembling, and looked very pale. She was bitterly lamenting her fate. Ralph had become so rich, she said, and she hated money; and ended by sobbing forth hysterically,

'Think of poor, dear papa, Daisy darling! how sad it all makes me!'

'But surely Ralph does not ask you to marry him on the sly!' exclaimed Maude.

'Not urge me, Daisy; but Ralph is so romantic, and knows every poet by heart!'

'Ralph would do nothing wrong, Birdie; I have seen enough of him to know that.'

'Oh, Daisy! you dearest of pets!' exclaimed Lady Beatrice, affectionately kissing her little cousin, 'you are so true!'

The soldier's daughter was decided if quiet, and capable, if thoroughly roused, of energetic, heroic action. She quietly said, 'I am only true to those I love. Stay, darling,' she added suddenly, 'I'm true to those I hate!' Her bright eyes flashed, while her small and delicately formed frame trembled with excitement.

'Don't, darling, say such things!' implored her little cousin, feeling alarmed at her inward agitation.

'Kiss me, dearest Birdie, and I'll say no more; but I promised Ralph I'd guard his precious treasure!'

'You?—guard me!' said Birdie innocently.

'Only during his absence; but I'll write and tell him to come!'

'Do, Daisy, and I'll always do as you advise; you are always right; I wish I had a head like yours!'

'And I a heart like thine, sweet child of Innocence and Love!'

'And when you're gone away, if I have anything to say, I'll telegraph, like Ralph did for old Macjoy; I know you'll come, my precious Daisy!'

'I will, my own sweet child. Ah, how I wish I were dear Ralph!'

'You!—why, my love?' asked Birdie wonderingly.

'I'd never go away from Birdie!' said little Maude, embracing her cousin tenderly.

'Sweet Maude! to talk like that! Ah, p'raps he never will when next he comes!'

'How odd! that's just what I was thinking!'

'Then, Maude, I do believe we two have lived before, as Ralph would say!'

Chapter XXV.

'Climb not too high, lest the fall be the greater.'—*Old Saying.*

'Quite a City man, sir—quite a City man!' began the inhabitants in and about the purlieus of the Undone Vortex to say of Ralph Osborne.

It was not for me to laugh, and yet I did, for it did me good; I had been moaning for some time previously. Ralph Osborne a City man—ha! ha!

He had not 'closed his account immediately upon his return,' as he had told Viscount Playfair he would do!

The fumes of sulphurous smoke and flames might burst ever and anon from the site of Todigrab's Bank in Money Street; the balance at his own might increase to such an extent, that his former wealth, considerable as it had been, appeared utter insignificance; the tragic end of the Arch-Spoiler—a Vampyre of the first degree—a Vampyre!—to which he, thirsting for others' wealth, was fast assimilating, might sometimes flit in memory across his excited brain; and the consciousness of his deep, burning love for his little charmer, allied with the remembrance of her look and manner when she told him it would break her little heart if anybody whom she loved were to do Speculative business, might take possession of his entire being; yet Ralph Osborne had not closed his 'Speculative account'!

I heard him constantly saying he intended soon to leave off; and he was jotting down in his diary,

'Mean to go down very soon—marry her right off—no courtship—no humbug of any sort.'

'They won't let you,' I breathed; 'custom must be obeyed.'

'Bother custom!' he said impetuously.

'Ralph,' I breathed, 'bring her to spend her honeymoon with us. We'll welcome her—a million of us at a time.'

He was silent for a while; then suddenly exclaimed, 'I'll marry her on the sly!'

'What!' I breathed, in horrified amaze; 'and bring dishonour on Trememdon's noble race!'

'Dishonour's in the soul,' cried he, 'as sin rests there; my Birdie cannot sin! I'll follow Birdie everywhere!'

'Nay, lad, but you would lead!'

'My love would lead, and I would follow—Birdie!'

'Then love as others love, and marry you like they.'

'I'll not do violence to my soul.'

'Rash youth!'

'I am not rash—I'm past it.'

'So you wild youth all think; and then—'

'Then what, old Spectre? I'm ready now to honeymoon away in Spectre-land.'

'And marry on the sly! We will not have you. Act openly—ten thousand of us at a time will all unite in One and do her tiniest bidding—a million rather! Now fancy, Ralph—a million Spectre-power all blended into One, and millions more all ready to aid the wond'rous charm!'

I fancied by his look I had him now, so left him.

Chapter XXVI.

'For I am nothing if not critical.'—Shakespeare.

'I'll join you all,' cried this gipsy of all the gipsies, 'if you promise to obey me to the letter—fail that, and I leave you this hour!' And the whole gipsy tribe of Bluffshire did promise to obey Harry Somers, the outcast soldier-Hercules, to the letter. They stole no more; they worked like honest men, under an honest, fearless leader, and great were the rest and quietude amongst the farmers after the tribe had adopted him. When they heard his tale they extolled him to the skies. There was little fear of detection now that the scar on his forehead was dyed the same colour as his face, neck, hands, and arms. Under his active leadership and management the men soon found employment on farms, made baskets, or cut peat, and in their humble way became well-to-do thriving people.

* * * * * * *

Pale indeed was the rose of Trememdon, and downcast, too, the next time I gazed upon her beauteous features. There was no Ralph near, so I thought I would just take a peep at those lips he was for ever raving about! It was rude I know for a gentleman—I mean a Spectral one—to loiter about on purpose to look at a young girl's lips! Well, I did it! As Ralph was not there I thought they might be 'taking it out' in gentle repose, perhaps. Ah! no such thing!—her lips! Pray, sir, have you ever seen an early rosebud, just tipped with morning

dew, and then have watched it, pouting, bursting into life, with warmth and fragrance all around, and the glorious songsters welcoming each little leaflet, swelling higher than the rest, until it blossomed forth—a full-blown rose? You have, I know; but Birdie's lips were not like that!!

She was writing to Maude Trevosa. Thinking there could be no harm, I shifted my position—for I had seen—those lips! I now flitted just over her dainty little shoulder, and being all in a tremble at suddenly finding myself 'so near and yet so far,' I tried to read, but it was so blotted with tears I could only catch a word or two here and there.

'Grimmouth Castle, Aug. 3.

'My darling Daisy,

'Here —— at last! would you—too! think —— Ralph *has* gone mad! you—heard about poor papa! —but still our Name remains!—*Old Trememdon's Name!*—our boasted heritage!—flatly refused—they've ruined him!—by Saints, Maude! S A I N T S!!! think of that—couldn't spoil our Name—worth ten million Saints!!! — ruined poor papa! — horrid Fleasum at Trememdon! Papa refuses — see any one from City! Pills Nostr —— grave!—Papa kissed me — won't see Ralph! — swore great big oath! — blood — cold! looked so fierce! I did not know papa swore! — wish — you — here! to kiss me, love! Yes, darling—he cursed!—mad, I know—mad!—you know — I — *I — feel it coming too!!* Ah, if Ralph were only poor! — or, came! Papa showed Ralph's letter — so kind and —— cheque — he said, "Here's money — city! — take! — do what—like with it." I saw Ralph's name — I said, "Papa! Ralph is not a Vortex broker!" — silent! — Oceans — kisses —

'Your loving

'Birdie.

'P.S.—I've got th' —— cheque.'

Fleasum had not been established at Trememdon Castle an hour before he made the strictest search for Somers. Owing to the regard in which the Soldier-gipsy was held by all the people, however, he made no progress. The 8th of August came, and Lady Beatrice again sat down to write to Maude; I was able to decipher nearly all of it. It ran thus—

'Another letter from dear Ralph; oh, Daisy, if I only had your cleverness! My head aches with thinking. What if you come to find your little Birdie—mad! The cheque is for one hundred thousand pounds! "only a loan," said Ralph,—how

rich he must be getting! He complains bitterly of papa's great unkindness. When we are married he will turn that horrid Fleasum out of the Castle. He wants me to—oh, yes, I must tell you! Papa is so kind—and Geraldine is too. She sleeps where you would if you came. Pray for and write to

'Your fond

'BIRDIE.'

On the 13th she again was writing to Maude, thus—

'Say, are you ill, my pet, that you do not write? I can scarce hold my pen, I am so wretehed! I have given up thinking altogether, and have, instead, a dull, heavy aching, which I pray God may never be yours. I know what I am going to do is wrong. And Geraldine, who is so kind, sometimes says it is, but then she says, what else can I do? and I'm sure I don't know, and I've given up thinking—oh, dear! And now papa will not hear dear Ralph's name mentioned, or any one's from the city. Isn't it all horrid? When I come to think of it all I don't wonder at poor dear papa swearing—I should, were I a man. How I hate this place!—because it's not Trememdon, I suppose. How I can write I don't know—to no one but you. Write directly you get this. I enclose the cheque for you to see. Only think, papa has just forbidden any person from the city to enter the grounds!—I fear his mind is going! I overheard him muttering, "Beware the fury of a patient man." Oh, Daisy, it made my blood run cold!—I hung about his neck and kissed him so, he pressed me to his bosom—I couldn't speak—and said, smoothing away my long thick hair from off my forehead—he crying all the while, something like this, for indeed I can't quite recollect, "My love for my dear children is all that's left to me, my own fond baby—my best-loved child!" Ah! then I could have worshipped dear papa. I felt so guilty, oh, so wicked! but, Daisy darling, it's soon to be all right. Ralph says we shall soon be back again, and then—"out upon them!" he says. What could papa have meant? I do hope he won't injure anybody. Oh, dearest, come! he has not soiled our Name yet. These Saints were very rash to court his vengeance. What might it not lead to! Ah, I would stay it, Maude—but what can little I o! It makes me shudder.'

Part the Fourth.

Chapter I.

'You say to me-wards your affection's strong;
Pray love me little, so you love me long.'—Herrick.

Although Harry Somers was a man whose equanimity, until he met Lady Beatrice Violet Playfair, not the flutter of the most soul-stirring petticoat had ever yet disturbed, and was, when unexcited by stimulants, as slow as his proverbially slow fellow-countreemen; yet, when once he had loved with all the madness, fervour, and devotion of a virgin passion, and had awoke to the consciousness that he loved hopelessly, his mind endeavoured to assimilate to that bright vision which encircled him as with a moral halo so pure that it took possession of his whole being even more entirely, and in a more sacred manner, than if his passion had been returned. His thoughts soared as they had never yet done, and his inner life was changed. Hence the firmness, the uniformity, and the perseverance in design which marked the course he had laid out for himself, viz. that of guarding her.

* * * * * * *

I had well-nigh forgot your little world, its 'businesses,' its cares, and its people; I've had so much to do in distant Spheres.

All? not Birdie, nor Ralph, nor others.

I well recall one morning. Reginald was at his club. A telegram, 'Haste, haste! The Rose with Ralph is flown!'

He stands like one transfixed. 'My God! My life!' he gasps, 'My soul!' and falls back in his chair.

He passes his hand across his brow, stands up, and cries out in tones of anguish, 'Where is Ralph Osborne?' He turns, he gazes around; he hastens to another street, in cold trepidation, and stops before a door.

'Is Captain Slasher in?'

I saw the two conferring.

'Hush, hush!' said Reginald; 'nor tell to living soul.'

'I don't believe one word,' the young dragoon replied. 'Let us see Ralph.'

'Nor I—so come,' said Playfair.

They quickly drive a hansom down to Ralph's, but Ralph

was not at home. Both stare aghast. 'Since when?' 'For days,' the servant man replies. In horror Slasher cries, 'We must see Maxwell.'

'What! let *him* know our foul disgrace—our stain!'

'Playfair, you're rash. I know Ralph Osborne.'

'And so thought all, brave Oswald. I loved the man.'

'I love Ralph Osborne still,' replied the yonng dragoon.

'And fain would I love Ralph; but see—he says "for days."'

'For days, or years—I love Ralph Osborne.'

'And I love Beatrice—my father—all!' the guardsman hotly cried.

'And I love Beatrice—your father—and you all!'

I saw the two embrace, and then the Viscount wildly sobbed, 'Oh, Ralph! why, why thus rob us of our all, at such a time—and my poor father!—now!'

'Let's hasten to your club; there may be news.'

I saw them hurry up the steps.

'Another telegram, my lord.' He reads.

'Oh, take it, Oswald—see—my father!'

I saw the young dragoon lean gently over him, while neither spoke a word. I mused,

'Ah, better leave strong hearts alone in griefs like these!—his father!'

Chapter II.

'I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honour more.'—Richard Lovelace.

I flitted down upon the Bluffshire coast, and saw a tall figure stooping on the sand inside a cave which lay beneath the Castle of Grimmouth. How carefully the man treads; and now he stoops and kisses the cold, wet sand.

''Tis hers—'tis hers!' cries brave Hugh Nairn, and flinging himself amongst the swarthy seaweed, he kisses again the sea-moist sand. Throwing his brawny arms around those tiny foot-prints he lies quite motionless upon the ground, like one bereft.

I heard a loud 'Halloo,' and looked. High on the cliff, first ranging, then beck'ning back his followers, stood Harry Somers. With terribly eager haste he gained the cave, then stooping low wildly embraced the sand. The guardsman turns and weeps. The soldier-Hercules, with fiery passion traced upon each lineament, in agony and hate, breathless, exclaims, ''Tis hers—Tremendon's rose!' His face—though stained—now blanched, the

scar upon his brow shone clear and white; he grasped Hugh's hand. 'Away! bold Hugh—his blood!' he cried, and drawing his trusty sword he raised it high. 'Twas for a moment! in the next, he breathed again, 'Oh, Hugh! brave Hugh! She is safe! Ay, by yon Sun—this Earth—this sternest Love—Trememdon's Curse shall be removed!'

Drawing his long sheath-knife, Hugh now knelt down and cut the prints—each tiny step, but let the others stay. By well-known sign a dusky gipsy girl appears with osier-plait; she weaves a frame. Hugh puts the fragments side by side. Soon I saw Somers and Hugh upon the cliff, bearing their precious freight. The followers orderly retire, and sad they looked, each man, for they all well loved their dauntless chief.

Chapter III.

'A change came o'er the spirit of my dream.
The Lady of his love;—oh! she was changed,
As by the sickness of the soul;
. . . her thoughts
Were combinations of disjointed things;
. . . the glance
Of melancholy is a fearful gift;
What is it but the telescope of truth,
Which strips the distance of its fantasies,
And brings life near in utter nakedness,
Making the cold reality too real?'—Byron.

Skimming the Western seas, I soon was in the state cabin of the Viper, where Geraldine and Lady Beatrice were quietly conversing. I'd tried to do my best to stay the deed, but Spectres are mostly powerless when wild, mad Love is raging strong. How pale the younger looked,—she had been weeping. Geraldine was p'raps just one shade paler. Lady Beatrice lay upon her couch, her long thick hair dishevelled, and lying in wildest profusion about her, fell upon the floor. She looked so small a thing away from it, but much more lovely—so Ralph would say. As she lies reading I try to follow; it seems to be very disjointed.

'Clarendon Hotel, Westernport, Aug. 15.

'My own, my precious Birdie,

'The clouds begin to pass—hurrah!—from off the dark horizon—oh, what suspense! my warm blood chills! I dare not think!—so many letters have I written—what dark despair was mine,

to see my own—my fair one flitting from my sight, just as the cup was raised—e'en to my lips—to see it pass away, without one effort. Oh, God forbid! while soul, while nerve, while heart remained—ay, e'en one little shred ! 'twas all your own !

'The clouds, so low'ring, are lifting fast. You—*you* have raised my hopes—my more than life ! the tiny gap looms well in sight, it widens even now, it's nearer still—ay, close at hand. Soon, soon we both shall be well through; the gap will then become a breach, the breach a full horizon, with room for us to move about and sport in at our pleasure. To think ! that cup of happiness—raised but to be dashed away ! That—oh, that I never could have long endured ! soon I must have done something most horrible. What, I dare not think ! My heart is bleeding for you all, but now I will not harrow up those sacred feelings. I live to see your father and you all restored to your full rights. Dear Maude is with her aunt; she is unwell—will shortly write. She says, be not alarmed, you know her well. Geraldine must be a priceless treasure to you all just now.

'Take little luggage, send no telegrams—they only excite suspicion, everything now depends *on secrecy*. My poor heart bleeds to draw you into this, believe me, love, there is no other way. In one short week—by special license, too, hurrah ! My heart bounds high at the bright thought. Put few things in your trunk; my yacht will soon steam in. A man shall bring your things; ask him no questions. Do not exclaim at seeing me in disguise; my beard's now black—just think—and big, with bushy eyebrows to match, from Wellfitt's. We steam for Macgloom Bay direct. Assume coolness—how hard ! say little—you never know your people, though I think I can trust my men. Keep a true, brave little heart. 'Twill soon be past ! And then for Old Trememdon, and out upon those Villains ! Your father, the Marquis, will surely listen when he finds you are my precious little wife, and I—his son ! He will —he will !

'And now, my more than life—be brave !

'Ever your own, fond, fond

'RALPH OSBORNE.'

I heard a stifled moan. I looked. She was in tears, kissing the signature. She whispered, 'To be so near—so very near—and yet—,' she stopped, and turning to Geraldine she said, 'Let us replenish the lamp—'twill even then go out before I sleep—I kept my vigil all night long—I dared not look within—Ah, Geraldine !' she now sobbed forth, 'and he so near !'

And soon I saw fair Geraldine asleep, with arms of marble pallor entwined around her sad companion; but Lady Beatrice still kept her silent watch.

Chapter IV.

'I tell thee, minstrel, I must weep,
Or else this heavy heart will burst.'—Byron.

Maude Trevosa was a girl who, when thoroughly roused to action, was long before she settled down again, but when the excitement had passed away, she then would ramble on without an object—her idle sails fluttering in the wind the while, ready for any change of weather, which, once arrived, might lash the placid waves to a storm, and urge her listless bark along.

If she regretted an idle hour or day, she said, 'I cannot make myself a shadow—what's the use?'

Give Maude a potent motive, her frame was all aglow—her fragile form started to life. Invincible, intrepid, and daring beyond her years, she was one in ten thousand. Maude was quiet now. I overheard her saying, 'Auntie is better now—I'll wander—where shall I go? I think I'll visit Bluffshire.' I left her in the train.

Chapter V.

'Fierce as the gloomy vultures now
To thee, old man, my deeds appear;
I read abhorrence on thy brow,
And this, too, was I born to bear.
'Tis true that, like that bird of prey,
With havoc have I marked my way.'—Byron.

In the days I am speaking about, Undone city had a Mayor, called the Lord Mayor. He had a house in the centre of the city, called The Mansion.

In front of it I saw a man standing up, looking, oh, so pale! half-starved, and wretched, addressing a crowd. He called himself A Backaway Deluded Victim. He had bright crimson letters printed in large characters on his hat, breast, and back—B.D.V. He wore a flaming yellow coat and hat. The crimson represented blood, for that the poor B.D.V.s had been spoiled by Vampyres. The yellow denoted gold, the Vampyres having robbed the B.D.V.s as well (that's of course!)

The Lord Mayor's police told the poor devil to—'move on'—

I think they called it—the idea ! he 'move on !' But that jolly old buffer, the Lord Mayor, did not know what was wrong with B.D.V.,—but then he didn't inquire. The B.D.V. refused. Now, that was naughty; that there was no Lord Mayor's Mansion in Backaway was evident, nor police either, or probably the murder rate would not have been *one in nine hundred*—in other words, the highest in the known world ! (Oh, Shades of Catzpore and of Fleasum, hail ! Todi's apparation, hail ! This, this ye knew—to yon sweet Paradise ye shipped thousands of 'jaded surplus population,' free of expense !—but let the poor devil tell his own tale.)

B.D.V. was telling somebody, he didn't know very well whom, that it was all very well for defrauded bondholders to urge some Council or other to get their interests looked after; 'Their "interest" I mean,' said B.D.V., 'but let me tell 'em "Backaway" 'ave got no interest to give—wouldn't give it if she 'ad; but you don't care one bit for us poor devils, as you sent hout with that 'ere money o' yourn ! Cum now, ain't that 'ere a trafficin' in hooman flesh an' blood ?' He paused just five seconds for a reply, when the police took him to chokee, the Lord Mayor of Undone city looking on the while, for his carriage was stopped by the crowd. Yes, sir, the Lord Mayor's carriage was stopped by that poor devil of a fellow's crowd, and all about a beastly hole, unfit for cats, called 'Backaway,' and thousands of miles away ! And the Queen's would have been just the same, for that crowd was dense, and excited, and angry; and when that was so in the days I'm speaking of, it was a clear case of 'look out,' I can tell you. There was nothing half so terrible in the little Earth you now inhabit as the wrath of a justly indignant crowd of the people of the Old Countree. Poor B.D.V., however, looked so dreadfully bad, I think the Queen would, in the days I'm speaking of, have stopped Her Royal Carriage, and tenderly inquired about the poor wretch—She had such a good, warm, noble heart, had that Queen, sir,—just for all the world like little Birdie's !—but the Lord Mayor did not, and B.D.V. had been scattering pamphlets about, and collecting pence to buy bread with; and he had left such a happy home before he was inveigled out to Backaway. And now his dear wife and children lay out there in their cold, cold graves, and he would have lain in his, but his soul had risen within him, and he resolved to strain every nerve so that he should but return alive to tell his tale, and expose their villany—and for this he got put into chokee.

'Too damned bad !' I overheard Nimrod Myrabolanes saying, as he witnessed it.

'What!' I mused, 'that from Nimrod! is Nimrod changed? No? then it must be too *something* bad!' (Spectres are not permitted to indulge.)

When the police took him up they made a grab at his pamphlets.

'Don't you believe it,' cried B.D.V. in a hoarse, croaking, hollow voice, and threw the rest in the air; one caught my hobgoblin nose, and almost knocked me silly. I'll give you a few extracts.

'I hear voices all around crying for Vengeance—from afar, from distant lands where your deeds of villany are bitterly cursed! You shipped off thousands of hard-working Old Countree labourers with their wives and families, far away from all protection;—climate utterly unsuited;—left a prey to misfortunes to which some have found death preferable—a fate which was from the first inevitable! The Old Countree Government, too late, placarded the walls of every village and town with warnings not to go.' (What a government, sir! 'too late,' he says.) 'You Vampyres took no means to relieve their starving condition! and those who remain alive to tell their sad tale, instead of being landed proprietors on their own freehold estates, as you promised them, by means of advertisements in every public journal.' (Blush, oh, *Age!* Oh, *Daily Jabberer*, look small! Hide thy diminished head! oh, *Greatest Circulator!*) 'You inveigled them into leaving happy homes! What are they now? the outcast servants of cruel half-breeds! but what is that *to you?*

'You would make it appear that you have fulfilled your engagements with the public—this remains to be seen! Your victims have *no friends of influence* to advocate their deep wrongs and their cause, and show up your iniquity, for they are poor, while you remain in undisputed possession of your ill-gotten hoards! Subscriptions were obtained under false pretences. (Oh, too-confiding public!) Ye Vampyres! Ye go into bigger houses, keep more expensive establishments, and are considered models of respectability, giving to charities out of Spoliation's lucre! You cast no thought across the seas which drown the cries of your despairing dupes, whose eyes are glazed, whose tongues are parched, and whose bodies, worn to shadows, are yet compelled to drudge in yonder pitiless and savage land! They are too heart-broken and oppressed with their terrible misfortunes to do more than curse you in their misery and cry to Heaven for Vengeance!

'Go on, ye Arch-Spoilers, if ye think ye have no hereafter! Ye Cannibals of our clime! Ye Vampyres, fastening upon the

warm, red life-current of the People, with "dark deeds in high places" for your motto ! One is gone ! Shall the other remain?'

And this poor fellow had been sent to chokee. I wonder who he got to write that for him ! He went quietly enough; perhaps he was looking forward to at least one night's lodging, and food, and rest:—poor B.D.V. !

Chapter VI.

'Her gentle limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her loveliness.'—Coleridge.

'Geraldine ! Geraldine ! oh, Geraldine ! if Ralph would only speak—if he would only say one little word to me ! but oh, what bitterness is mine ! oh, won't you answer me ?—this dreadful sickness !'

'Why, Beatrice, you can't be worse than I am !' said Geraldine.

'I would not mind,' murmured the now half-penitent girl, 'if Ralph would only come out now and then, and not desert me quite ! now, don't you think he might, my darling ?'

For a while Geraldine was silent. At length she said, 'Dear child, do listen to the wind's wild whistle through the shrouds, or to the sea-bird's shriek—the men hallooing, or the rudder creak—oh, anything to drown one's thoughts !'

'Thoughts !' said the babe beside her; 'oh, thoughts indeed ! I thought that Ralph would meet me on the deck just now ; he didn't !' she continued sadly ; 'and Geraldine !' she cried, making a clutch at the alabaster arm now circling her heaving bosom, 'each sailor looks a cutthroat in disguise ! I wonder why he chose *them !* Oh, Geraldine !' she wildly sobbed, 'how hideous dear Ralph did look in his big beard and bushy eyebrows !'

The death-like pause which followed was broken by Birdie's wild scream, 'The ship's on fire ! look ! Geraldine, shall I tell Ralph ? oh say ! what shall we do ?'

The worn-out girl had flung herself upon the floor, while Geraldine jumped off the swing couch in a moment, and opened the cabin-door.

'Why, look !' cried she, 'it comes from Ralph's own cabin !'

'Wake, wake, dear Ralph !' shrieked the affrighted girl. She thundered with both hands and feet against his cabin-door—'twas fast ; she burst it in. Half conscious, stifled, stupefied, she raved, 'I'll save him !'

In fiercest desperation. she rushed through blinding smoke,

her loosely-flowing robe and long hair streaming behind. Striving to seize him in her arms, she had half embraced *him*, and then with piercing shriek to Heaven, with lovely arms uplifted wildly, of every sense bereft,—cold,—stark,—and motionless —SHE fell

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CHAPTER VII.

'His life was gentle, and the elements
So mixed in them, that Nature might stand up
And say to all the world, *This was a man.*'—SHAKESPEARE.

'Is the Marquis dead?' asked a Vortex broker.

'Dead as a door-nail,' replied a Saint.

'Well, if men *will* gamble, and knock estates—'

''Twasn't that,' interposed an outsider. 'I hear they pressed him hard over that Swindle of Swindles, "Fleasaway"!'

'Hush, sir! no such words in my office,' said Saint Peter indignantly.

Charles Markham had left the Sternite to himself, quietly saying that the public should be made acquainted with all the facts.

'The People's Hall! a meeting!' voices were heard to say outside. They entered.

'What's all the fuss about?' asked Saint Luke.

'Why, Markham's to be there,' all cried.

Excitement was hourly on the increase, for Victims were invited to come forward.

I journeyed West, and saw Countless Thousands proceeding, some fifty abreast, reaching from the Cathedral in the city, densely packed, and occupying every inch of space right up to the very doors of the People's Hall! Flamming's Cross and Hero's Square were mobbed with them; they all seemed thoughtful, quiet, eager, earnest men, but, oh! so pale and shrunken!

Talk of a Spectre! Ah, Spectres blush not, or I would have blushed for them!

In addition to Sir Manfred Locock's being an 'estimable' man, and a warm friend of Ralph's, he was capital at taking chairs at public meetings. He never told a tale without spoiling it, and this made people laugh, because his tales were mostly stale, and they, knowing what ought to come, were much amused at the gusto with which he gave his version of each, in his ponderous manner; and as it would have been mortal offence to have laughed except as at the wit, and not at him, they, liking Sir

Manfred for his many 'estimable' qualities, laughed accordingly, and he never found it out!

Sir Manfred was in good form the day of the People's meeting, and took the chair.

'I hate the Undone Vortex, but what are we to do?' I heard a pretty little woman say. 'I do so wish my husband had never entered it!' And Sir Manfred, who was greatly given to the fair sex, entreated her—very much moved himself—thus: 'Consult your heart, my pretty little creature,' and followed up with, 'Woman will make her quiet influence felt!'

Captain Oswald Slasher rose, the Chairman excusing himself from speaking, on the ground of having had 'too close application' of late (the Spectre mused, 'to beef and beer!'). 'The Slashers pride themselves on being blunt,' said Oswald; 'I stand here in no uncertain attitude to-night. I denounce the Committee of the Undone Vortex! A Victim I have been for years, but will no longer be. I am influenced by public motives alone. I have hoisted my colours high—you'll find them fastened to the mast—the vessel shall not strand! I call upon you Victims to come forward,' he continued, 'Sons of Despoiled Widows—Brothers of Ruined Maidens—Lovers of Broken-hearted Girls—the flower of the youth of this merrie Old Countree!' (Cries of 'Down with the Sharpers!') 'I attack the system because of its secrecy, and villany consequent on secrecy, filling the purlieus of the Vortex with a moral contagion, polluting the atmosphere with the criminal's breath, plundering and despoiling with unappeasable appetite—confidence and rectitude being alike ignored and blasted!'

He paused. Vehement and long-continued cheering followed. The Victims set up a shout; a fund was set on foot immediately, to which Sir Oswald Slasher, Bart., who was on the platform, contributed munificently, Sir Manfred and many other gentlemen doing the same. A Resolution, which was put and carried without a dissentient voice, was to the effect that a petition be sent to both Houses of Parliament, praying for a commission to inquire into the very great abuses at present existing in the Undone Vortex as an Institution, with a view to its immediate and absolute abolition on its present footing, and to the substitution in its place of an Open National Stock and Share Market, free to all.

There was a truly honest ring about all this man said, which endeared him to the hearts of every one in that vast assemblage. The cheering at this stage became so enthusiastic that I trembled for my safety, so I flitted from the gasalier. I, however, was not prepared for the scene which followed. Hundreds of sweet, soft

voices were heard shouting 'Oswald!' Sir Manfred being somewhat jealous, cried 'Order!' but in vain; the cries for 'Oswald!' predominating. Scores of bouquets were showered at his feet. Sir Manfred picked up one just delivered by a remarkably handsome girl straight for Slasher. She was a good shot, but Sir Manfred Locock happening to stoop just then to feel whether his knee-cap really was to the left or right, or whether he had one at all, it caught his head, and falling down at his feet, he claimed it. The pretty girl, however, disclaimed all intention of being so rude, and Sir Manfred, not rising from the position most convenient for ascertaining certain osseous localities, quietly allowed Charles Markham to pick it up, which he did, and bowing low to the girl aforesaid, he handed it to his friend.

Slasher now proposed the health of 'you know who.' All did know who, and when they got to 'Confound their knavish tricks,' there was such a burst of honest enthusiasm, that I only wished a few more of the members—and especially of the Committee—of the Undone Vortex had been there to hear it!

The next day, seeing the turn affairs were taking, the Undone Vortex Committee held a Committee-meeting in the Committee-room of the Vortex; and the day after, and the day after that, to discuss the matter; but it ended in their doing nothing at all. Many of them, sitting over their lunch, which was provided at the usual luncheon-table, chuckled inwardly, and laughed, and sneered, saying, 'What can they do indeed! Victims! ha! ha! ha! hia! ha! hia! ha! ha!' But they all preserved grim silence outwardly. When Slasher heard about it, he said to himself, 'I've somewhat helped to number your days, my boys, nevertheless! I'll see what more can be done! All in good time!' And the Spectre laughed 'Ha! ha!' NOT 'Hia! ha!' he left it to Spoilers to indulge in that luxury!

Chapter VIII.

'Revenge, at first though sweet,
Bitter ere long back on itself recoils.'—Milton.

A few weeks flew by, and I saw Ralph in a sick chamber. Sensitive, if strong, his constitution rallied at last, but the ravages of fever were still plainly visible. Macjoy told him he must try not to think. And then he would think—to madness!

Footsteps approached, and he appeared alive to the reality.

'I must be mad,' he said shuddering; 'strange house—oh, horror! they've put me here! I wonder if I really am—'

Macjoy and another entered, but his dear friend no longer wore his accustomed smile. Presently they both start—away from him! further yet—and they were gone in a moment. 'Twas utter silence; he tried to rise, and fell back powerless upon the bed; big drops stood on his brow, his hands cleuched in agony. 'Am I—oh, am I—' and then all power of utterance was gone—he muttered incoherently, and gazed up into the farthest corner of the room, which appeared so strange, so terribly oppressive, and then gasped, 'I am—I must be!'

Hours after they had returned; he had been dozing fitfully. Nerved by some sudden impulse, he was proceeding to dress. Macjoy placed his arms around him, and soothingly endeavoured to dissuade him.

'Why am I here, Macjoy?' he asked, then suddenly exclaimed, 'It's all one now—I'm mad—I know—I know—I—bah! I want no soothing; you know I'm mad. Do madmen think and talk like I am doing? Then I am mad! I'm for Revenge and Hate!'

Seizing a pen he began to write, Macjoy giving him a glass of wine in sips, he chattering on about his stocks and shares, and the Committee. He had not written half a dozen lines when he fell back into Macjoy's arms—pale, faint, and exhausted—and lay for hours like one in a trance, his long beard and hair fluttering in the autumn wind like nut-brown, waving grass.

'To do, e'en if to die; to do, e'en while I die!' I heard him mutter between his closed teeth.

They placed him on the bed; he fell asleep, with a broken heart's deep, burning curse upon his lips! He would have mighty, withering Revenge! All other thoughts had paled; he had no solace left but there to lie harbouring, deep down in his tumultuous bosom, the fiercest passions which can consume the soul!

With curses on his lips, he slumbers tranquilly!

Chapter IX.

'Tramp on a worm, and she'll turn her head.'

'Where's the poor devil now?' asked Harry Somers of Hugh Nairn, upon the high cliff near Grimmouth cave, one dark September night.

'They say he's hiding not very far from —' said Hugh, not

caring to pronounce the name, but pointing up at the frowning woods overhanging Grimmouth Castle, which, in the darkness, resembled huge, black rocks, just over their head. 'He spilt blood all the way from Trememdon Park—and that's a good dozen miles—to the wood. Not much chance of the poor wretch surviving, I fear.'

'Lion will scent him out, then,' returned Somers.

'Poor devil!' sighed Hugh. 'When will these horrors end?'

'Not till the Vortex is destroyed!' said Somers solemnly.

'Then God in mercy destroy it!' was Hugh's earnest reply.

John Fleasum was no more! Once more had the B.D.V. stood up in front of the Lord Mayor's Mansion in Undone city; once more had the police ordered him to 'move on,' He did move on, for he had now another mission to fulfil. Crying aloud, in hollow, prophetic tones, to the fast-gathering crowd, 'One is gone! the other shall not remain!' the poor deluded Dupe from 'Backaway' gathered strength for his bloody deed. Despairing of rousing the apathy of his fellow men by any other means, and actuated by uncontrollable feelings of Hate and Revenge, he, having begged his way all along the road to Bluffshire, secreted himself in the plantations around Old Trememdon Castle.

Acting in his new capacity as county magistrate, Fleasum had been fulminating a fresh edict against 'that Murd'ring Villain Somers,' as he called him. Little apprehending danger so near home, he, and his two bosom friends Lanky and St. Peter, were strolling leisurely towards the Castle through the plantation, having sent their horses round by the road with the groom. Profiting by the lesson he had learnt in those wild, savage haunts to which Fleasum had consigned him, a man emerged from behind a tree in its thickest part, and, springing on him like a tiger, stabbed him several times in the back with a long, sharp blade, and then ran for his life. Fleasum, discharging a pistol at the assassin, fell to the ground. The two Saints ran, they said, for assistance; but as they did not return until the report that blood had been tracked at least a mile off was confirmed, it was open to doubt. Fleasum expired, in less than an hour, from loss of blood. Thus were the Arch-Spoilers dropping off one by one—paying the penalty of their misdeeds! Todigrab was no more, and now Fleasum's hand was still in death!—that hand which had signed away men's, women's, and children's souls and bodies to Backaway! Those two Arch-Spoilers, whose hands had been turned against their fellows in every way that human ingenuity could devise, but an open, manly way, were now meeting, face to face—in a land where no fear of the LAW OF LIBEL, nor

of CONSEQUENCES, could operate to deter them from proclaiming the TRUTH—their Dupes, whom they had led on, the one secretly, and both irresponsibly,—to ruin!

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The next morning it was announced in all the daily journals that a terrific fire had broken out spontaneously in the offices of the great city firm of Catzpore and Fleasum, Aurum Factors, Dooum-Easy Lane. As in the case of Grab Brothers, it had assumed the proportions of a gigantic Vortex, resembling it exactly. Simultaneously, Todigrab's Old Vortex reopened. Many of the inhabitants began to quake and fear. Some even said they could discover cracks appearing in the Undone Vortex itself, and began to ask each other, 'When will these things end?' and nobody seemed to know, or what to make of it all. Such fearful sights had never been seen before. Even the lisping, thoughtless Freddy Stanley was heard to exclaim, after being 'cleared out' for the sixteenth time:

'I thhall begin to retrieve—ith time, I think—retrieve! retrieve!' and from that moment he was cured of all desire for 'Speculative Business'!

CHAPTER X.

'Some said, "John, print it;" others said, "Not so."
Some said, "It might do good;" others said, "No."'—BUNYAN.

'AND how is Ralph?—how are they all?' asked Lord Alfred Ernest Playfair of Doctor Macjoy shortly after they had met at the Clarendon Hotel, Westernport; his little craft, the Sybil, then lying among the vessels in Westernport docks.

Lord Alfred was in one of the old Marquis's jolliest of humours. Instead of climbing up Terribleazo, as was generally supposed, the young lord had gone straight to Middletown. He didn't see, he said, why that little minx Maude should have all the fun to herself, and be kicking up her heels in the Old Countree to her heart's delight, and Haini be out of it all; so he went to fetch his pretty cousin and her aunt away, and brought them home.

Haini was now listening eagerly to Doctor Macjoy, who told them that Ralph was busy writing.

'Then tell him to knock it off—say I'm here, there's a good chap. Just fancy, Haini, Ralph Osborne in this house!'

And Haini first looked up, and then she looked down; after that she looked sideways; and finally didn't look any way hardly, but turned her downcast eyes silently away. But Haini's big,

warm heart went pit-a-pat—a-pat—and than a-pit—and after that a-pat a good many times; but Lord Alfred was not supposed to see that.

'Tell him to knock it off,' said the impetuous Alfred, much in the same playful, jolly way as he would have said to Ralph in Fernland, 'I say, old fellow, kick that nigger's —— for me, will yer?' expecting the nigger to kick him in return.

'But, you see, it's here!' said Macjoy, touching his forehead.

'The devil!' replied Alfred in amaze. The bright colour paled from Haini's cheeks; then it mantled again, only to leave them paler than before.

'What's it all about?' asked Alfred earnestly; 'we must do something.'

'Will you fetch Reginald?' asked Macjoy; 'I didn't like to write.'

'Fetch! we would do anything for Ralph, wouldn't we, Haini?'

The beautiful half-caste girl had been listening with silent eagerness; but being thus appealed to, her warm, fiery nature, impatient of control, burst all bounds. Advancing quickly to where the two men were standing, her eyes flashing with an unusual lustre, and with both arms raised, as she turned towards her cousin, she cried, in tones of passionate earnestness,

'Oh, Alfred, I'll die for Ralph! I'll die for Ralph! I'll die for him! He brought me out of death to a life which nothing can destroy! Alfred, I owe Ralph—all!'

She then turned and gave one look at the young Doctor, who stood watching her with a gaze of admiration and sympathy, coloured deeply, and burst into a violent flood of tears. Both men were entirely unprepared for this exhibition of warmth, and Lord Alfred led her gently away. The same night he left Westernport for Undone city, where he found his brother, now—the Marquis of Trememdon!

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Shortly afterwards, I saw Macjoy with Ralph, who was writing—not about Lady Beatrice Violet Playfair!

He was deeply engaged. In the next room to his a young girl was practising her scales. This seemed to distract the boy. He rose, and, I am afraid, used 'bad langwidge'! She now tried a simple tune, stopping at every false note, and recommencing thus: Tumpy, tumpy, tumpy, *tump—tump—tump!* (stop.) Tumpy, tumpy—tump—*tump!* (stop.) Tumpy, &c. This was irritating, and Ralph paced the room in misery. At length she stopped altogether.

Ralph Osborne had for many months previously been engaged in helping to kick about a huge 'football;' he was not at the time aware of it; such, however, was the case. To his intense satisfaction, it had grown bigger and bigger under his very eyes, much to the surprise and chagrin of his half-brother, who himself even had not the most remote idea of its vastly accumulating properties.

'Verily, indeed it hath taken!' mourned the Saints, for they had been advised by Walter not to 'touch' it; but, like some huge snow-ball, which, after rolling over and over, and increasing momentarily at a progressive ratio, suddenly falls in two, and, refusing to move further, defies all the efforts of the bewildered youngsters to patch it together again, so Ralph awoke one fine morning to find his 'football' had collapsed! It was intended to 'burst'—and burst it did accordingly. In vain did Ralph frantically endeavour to patch it up. Handful after handful of fresh snow might the youngsters throw on the broken mass—it would be of no account. No efforts of theirs could prove of any avail, and very soon there was nothing left, to mark the spot where it had lain, but a slight accumulation of dust and gravel. Ralph had thrown pocketful after pocketful of good, hard cash, new, crisp bank notes, good, clean-looking scrip, and sound, wholesome shares, into the fast-diminishing heap, and as fast as he threw them in, Walter and others took them out, And the infatuation was so great, that Ralph could not stop!

'Pickle the bears! cried Jacob,' I heard Ralph say; 'and so did Walter, and that demon Clencher. Ah, I recollect I accused Dapper of putting false "names" to my "contracts," in order to mislead me, and he replied in honeyed tones, "*Oh, no, my dear fella, no such thing! That would have been a dirty trick, indeed, for him to be selling you what he all the while was urging you to buy!*" And Jacob Cautilous Dapper was my broker!—a sworn broker on the Vortex of Undone city, ha, ha! ha, ha!'

Placing his hands upon his burning brow, Ralph leant back, and ceased writing, then cried in a fervent whisper, looking up to heaven, 'E'en while I die!' and, starting up suddenly, looked around the room. He was in tears. 'Art Thou here?' he said. 'What! in this room? then speak to me! What! here with me,' he cried in anguish, 'and not to speak!' Looking reproachfully around, he whispered tremblingly, 'Were I a god, I'd speak to you, if you were sad! I cannot bear this utter silence!—Shall I have strength? Ah, none can tell!'

He stopped—he bit his pen—passed his hand wildly through his hair, saying excitedly,

'Ah, that Committee!—quick! let me put it down—"*all tarred with the same brush!*" Is that right? I'll look at it in the morning—my head! my head!—how the blood runs—how I reel!—oh, God! it must be wrong!'

For some minutes all was silence. I heard a movement, and then, 'And I have lost—my all!'

His sudden vehemence startled me. Ah, thought I, it has come! I looked at him to see; but no! his thoughts, as yet, were all centred on the loss of so many pounds, shillings, and pence! He sighed, then hissed, '"More cover—more cover;" and then again "More cover!"—and Maxwell and Cautilous divided the spoils amongst them; and I had made a lot of money! Cautilous had told me lies about the "names"—sworn liar that he is!'

I breathed, 'Waste not your soul's energies on IT!'

'She said it,' he said, as if in reverie; 'if you would make money on the Vortex, don't Speculate! and she was right! and Cautilous was my broker!'

'Let him alone!' I breathed; 'your life will pay the forfeit!'

'Life!' cried he with wild vehemence; 'have I a life? Ah, am I here?—where?—why?—ah, leave me!—leave! "Pickle the bears!" the Vampyres cried; away they went—those crisp bank notes! those—ah, *you* know! "Get your Revenge!" they cried. Glass after glass of ruby wine!—day after day sped on!—they had me in their meshes—vision obscured—and all the while this broker toyed with me—this sworn broker of Undone city!' He paused, as though to collect his wandering faculties, then wrote again, '"But your account is so big!" he said, to draw me on, knowing I'd like it bigger; he "carries over" my heavy stocks, cheats me in "*backwardation*"! I pursue him to wreak my vengeance. "No time! no time to-day!" he shouts; "I'm full of 'business!'" "Damn your business!" I say. Stout porters guard *Alsatia's* entrance, and thrust me back. Jacob is safe!—inside the City Sanctuary for Modern Pickpockets! "No further, sir; no further, please!" and there grilled I "outside"! An hour afterwards I met the beast. "Smashed up!" he cries in glee. "Who's—?" "The Syndicate! changing hands in fifty thous at a time! awful hullabaloo!" Jacob had bought me everything—got my last "cover"! Thus went my valuable "shares"! Thus went my clean-looking "scrip"! Thus went all those "bonds" so new and cashy-looking! And they all did change hands, and never did return, for I *had* got all Maxwell's stock!'

(Good-natured young cadet! you told me this! but you were only in training, young Doowell!)

Ralph seemed lost in thought, then suddenly exclaimed,

'Not more than others do I deserve
And God has given me less!'

and then resumed:

'Light-hearted was Cautilous. Versatile and full of humour was he! How he chaffed me—"the great Manipulator" he called me! Having signed my "contracts," he hastened home, to act in private theatricals that night (not as Shylock surely!), and wanted time to prepare, did this broker on the Undone Vortex!' Ralph started—and paced the room in horror—she had begun again 'Tumpy—tumpy—tumpy—*tump—tump!*' &c.

Chapter XI.

'No beast so fierce but knows some touch of pity.'—Shakespeare.

Weeks had elapsed since little Maude had, in her desultory manner, resolved to go over into Bluffshire to see those dear, good people whom she loved so greatly. If she had been uncertain in the train, she was by no means so when, standing before the full mirror in the drawing-room of Macgloom Castle, she was transformed into a young feminine Slasher, as she brandished a dagger in one hand, and levelled a small-sized, never-failing six-shooter in the other, at her imaginary foe. Maude was a wretched correspondent, and not once having heard from her cousin, she concluded all was going on much as usual, and set-to wondering what she was doing at that very moment. She had no sooner heard, however, of all that had befallen her best-loved friend than her little heart, bleeding at every pore, nerving itself in a moment, became stout and brave.

Leaving a broken-hearted household, a desolate hearth, a deserted home—laden with the blessings and followed by the prayers of the distracted Marchioness and her sorrowing children—Maude Trevosa, convinced that foul play had been at work, hurried from the wretched, ruined old Castle, which was then giving her friends shelter—transformed in a moment from the fragile child into an intrepid, eager, and ready little woman!

'Ralph!' I heard her exclaim to Lady Gertrude, 'no! Ralph may be wayward and—naughty, but he is good down here' (pressing her little hand close against her heart), 'he!—he!—'

'My own, sweet, kind, good Maude, we all love Ralph; but then—' Lady Gertrude paused, and with a burst of tears, exclaimed, 'who can it be?'

'It is not Ralph!' said Maude Trevosa warmly; and the two embraced each other.

Within an hour of her arrival at the Castle, I saw her leaving it, accompanied by Hugh Nairn. Like a true North-Countreeman, Hugh proceeded to business. His little tragedy of the morning was over. Somers had matched the tiny footprints on the sand with 'a wee-doddie pair of boots,' as he called them, and Hugh had seen them standing in the mark they made.

Tediously the pony-jingle travelled along the hilly road between Grim Castle and the village of Old Trememdon.

'Now where's this man Trebraith?' asked little Minx, assuming the Slasher character. Hugh was staggered. 'I know it all!' cried she; 'he shall tell me something, or—' and Minx looked dangerous.

An expedition on the morning of the breaking-up of the Trememdon Christmas party shall now be described. Walter had given out that he would shortly be *en route* for some mine in Loveshire, on his way to Undone city. In brilliant spirits, relieved of an incubus, the rest of the party—devoid of City and of Saints—made for the hills. Never was day finer, never did hearts appear more light! In drag, and on horseback, the party started. They scoured the cliffs and moors. True, when some among them began to think, a choking sensation, accompanied by feelings of an indefinable dread, would cloud the bright outside prospect; but, dashing all cares away, they plunged into the spirit of the enjoyment of the hour with all the greater will and energy in proportion as gloomy thoughts arose. Descending the cliffs, after a long ride and drive together, the whole of the young people were soon engaged in investigating the interior of a great cave, from the further end of which Maude had declared, when stooping down to examine some pebbles at its mouth, she had heard the sound of a human voice. Having proceeded as far as they could with safety venture, a blue light suddenly flared up from the extreme end; which, disturbing some dozen seals who seemed to consider their rights invaded, caused them to plunge violently into a deep pool in the interior, and to rush heedlessly past the intruders, knocking nearly every one down in their course, little Birdie shrieking, half mad with delight, 'Lie down! lie down! my pets won't hurt you! lie down!' But when Walter advanced, torch in hand, accompanied by a rough-looking wrecker, Lady Beatrice became deathly pale, and clung to Ralph for protection, he plainly hearing her little heart beat violently, as upon his knees beside her he pressed her to him fondly; nor did its beating lessen till Walter, with his savage-

looking companion, had left them, after endeavouring to account for the apparition by telling them he was 'doing' a little seal-hunting for friends in the city, who valued their skins. Getting into their boat, which the man Trebraith piloted through an intricate passage into the open sea, they rowed out, and then sailed for Trememdon.

'What can the fellow be wanting here?' Ralph had asked himself, as he still pressed his darling, counting the beats, which, pulsating through a warm wall of flesh, thrilled his frame. 'He is so clever, too—but—there's something! What can it be? The fellow's plucky! There was that water-before-leap the other day—he took it, and 'twas a rasper! True, he fell, and I leapt over him as he lay the other side—his horse's fault—no judge of horseflesh, Walter; not a bad seat. Then he's always practising fencing now and broadsword, boxing, pistols, and—damn the fellow!' he muttered between his clenched teeth.

When Ralph emerged into the light, the party were half up the zig-zag path, and Walter and Billy Trebraith far on towards Trememdon haven, and long past Grimmouth bay.

'Last night,' said Hugh to little Maude, resuming, 'I saw a steamer making close in for Grimmouth bay. Long before I could approach, she had steamed out again. I made for the bay, however. Just behind the beacon on the high cliff, Billy was standing, muttering to himself. I challenged him. He was three parts tipsy, miss, and pulling out a bottle, asked me to have some good ship's rum. I examined a lady's reticule hanging on his arm, but he declined to let me open it. We parted; he stumbling along the stony road, I keeping to the mossy turf, a high stone fence intervening. I listened—"Noa! Billy beant a darned fule!' I heard him drivel; he now fell heavily, but continued, "He doant get his munnie for that ere. Aw be a soite more cliverer nor ye wi' awl yer —— But aw!—aw du feel cruel bad ower this ere job," and, weeping like a child, he continued, "'taint in moi loine exackerly—noa—pon moi sowl I du—not for they boath—aw noa! Aw moinded awnly the little waun!" Stopping, and weeping still, he soon began afresh. "Aw knaw tes hell aw'm goin' tu—aw dunna feere the d'vil hissel—but aw! that prittie flooer! they cawls 'er—to see she a-standen up an' pointen ower an' looken at me belaw! tes that aw'd moind!"

'Still weeping bitterly, and grinding his teeth, he suddenly exclaimed, 'Aw towld un soa—but he woant tak no refusin'—an' ere's moi munnie—fefty pund—aw'd thraw it awl away, cud aw undu the job this minnit!"'

Chapter XIII.

> 'These are the arts, Lothario, which shrink acres
> Into brief yards, bring sterling pounds to farthings,
> Credit to infamy; and the poor gull,
> Who might have lived an honoured, easy life,
> To ruin, and an unregarded grave.'—*The Changes.*

Lord Alfred was not the man to fold his arms, sit calmly, and despair. His presence inspired hope, while his fearless demeanour and engaging manners cheered, comforted, and charmed all with whom he associated. Through his thoughtfulness old Betty Nairn was now watching at the bedside of his old friend and companion, who still appeared to be unconscious of his Great Loss. All that Ralph seemed to comprehend as yet was, that he had lost all his money, and was 'cleared out;' that one of his late Vortex brokers was a cheat and a liar; and also—through the good-nature of the young Vortex tyro—how it had all been accomplished. He also knew that his 'account' had been transferred to honest hands.

I watched him by the aid of the lamp as he stood, first looking up at the ceiling, his thoughts apparently wandering, and then at his paper, as he wrote:

'And Goodheart sent me to the wary Cautilous for "names." I had to wait: my mind seemed trembling in the balance—I wonder if it's over now! I don't know; still I'll write, and if I live,' he added wearily, 'I'll look at it in the morning; perhaps there'll be a change of some sort then! Let me see; ah, I wandered up and down those office passages, and thought, "Are all those firms whose names I see, robbers like Cautilous—and liars too?" Cannot people live without robbing and lying? I'll never believe it! If 'tis so, I'll—' he paused a few seconds, and then went on,

'I got back again, and the clerk's office was empty, but somehow it didn't look like Cautilous' office at all. Still I pressed on. I heard receding footsteps, and then sounds further inside still, as of a human voice. Was it a dream? I knew that voice!'

He paced his room again with terrible energy, his eyes starting, and the big veins swelling in his forehead. Sitting down again, he wrote:

''Twas low, and sonorous with deep emotion! In vain he tried to stifle his utterance. Drawn to the spot, a thrill pervading my frame, bereft of all sense of delicacy, I gained the furthest inner room, passing a partner in another. It was

not Jacob's. Where was I? Oh, God! then help me to think! Keep—this—head—from—going—quite—before—it's done! to do before I die!' he ejaculated fervently. 'That's it—oh, God!' —he smiled his gratitude. 'I thought the partner stared; he was computing some Victim's margin! While I surveyed the scene before me, the speaker's words recurred distinctly: "Then I must sell out, and break my poor moth—"

'Ah, Birdie!' he shrieked, 'Birdie! where art thou? Where is my child? my own—my own—my—'

Ha! it had come at last! Trembling from head to foot, he had risen. Hastening to the window he looked out—above —around—then crying aloud, in tenderest, heart-breaking accents, clasping his arms around each other, he sobbed aloud,

'My love! where are you?' He sank upon his knees, raised his hands to heaven; but emotion such as his was too wild for prayer, too strong for anything; it seemed as if nerve, muscle, brain—all must go. He rose in his extremest agony, casting a wild, hurried look around upon his papers.

'Ha! and waste my soul on that!' he screamed; 'while she, my life, my precious child, is—'

He could not finish. Standing expectant, incredulous, he listened as if for distant sounds, his blanched lips quivering, the hot blood coursing up his veins, his temple bursting; with arms thrown towards heaven, his frame totters, while in accents terrible he gnashes through his teeth, 'Oh, God! Oh, God! I curse them!'

I saw them run to his assistance; they raised him from the floor, and placed him on the bed.

All, all was quiet then, as in a trance he lay. I saw his doctor shake his head, while old Betty murmured, in broken accents, 'Poor, poor, poor deary!'

Chapter XIV.

'I had a dream which was not all a dream.'—Byron.

'I heard Lieutenant Breezer challenge me, miss,' continued Hugh to little Maude, who was all attention now, he having handed her a paper he picked up that morning, which Trebraith had dropped beside the beacon on the hill. It had a date, and 'No. 5 Vortex Court, Undone,' at the top, with 'memorandum' printed next, then 'From Walter Maxwell to Mr. William Trebraith, Wrecker's Cottage, Trememdon, Bluffshire. In answer

to your inquiry, terms are—*Cash—down—on—Delivery*, per pro. W. Maxwell, Raskall Clencher.'

'"In the Queen's name, who goes there?" said the lieutenant. I soon explained matters, and went home, miss, and had a dream—' Hugh paused.

'Oh, tell me your dream, Hugh,' said little Maude.

He hesitated a few moments, then proceeded—

'Well, miss, I dreamt about bottles of rum, steamers, and reticules, all mixed, and I got somehow into a long cave, and Billy pulled a letter out of a reticule, and putting it in again, said, "Moore nor fefty pund!" Ever so many smugglers came in: they drank, sang songs, and wanted me to do the same. I tried to get away. I counted five hundred smugglers, all with great copper-red faces; then came five hundred barrels of rum, too; and they swore fearful oaths that it should all be drunk that night! Now I thought it would never do for me to let the Queen's enemies have it all their own way like that. A storm came on outside; the sea rising higher than ever it did before. At times the waves leapt into the cave, which much resembled Grimmouth, only 'twas bigger. As I was meditating upon a plan of getting out, four horrible-looking Gorgons, with flaming torches and fiery swords, appeared at its mouth, while broken bottles strewed the sand. These Gorgons kept guard over the smugglers' boots; I looked, and mine were among the number. There was one very Great Sea-King, who wore long boots, and kicked the others about. "Ship's rum!" I heard him cry; "the Queen gets nothing out of this!" And then he swore. "Silence!" the Great Sea-King roars, but still they cursed and swore most horribly. "The Great Sea-King sings!" bellowed a veteran smuggler. Some cheered, and others danced upon a table made out of planks, all laid upon the casks. But they wouldn't be quiet, miss. 'Twas just like in a pantomime. The Great Sea-King kicked some down; when these had rolled over, they jumped up behind, and, leaping on each other's backs, turned somersaults over the faces and heads of each other and the Great Sea-King, who didn't seem to mind, for he caught them in his arms and pitched them in the air, they always falling on their legs again. Presently I heard a monster with purple face cry out, in such a voice, "The Great Sea-King's song!" The barrels began to roll about and hurt the smugglers' bare feet, and made them bleed. "Be quiet, then," said the veteran, "then they won't hurt you!" The Great Sea-King now poised upon one leg, the other revolving round his head, his outstretched arms accompanying it, his body turning in the opposite direction, while lighted bottles of rum

flared at their extremities. Oh, what a voice he had, miss! like belching sounds from angry whales! It woke the echoes in the vast old cavern, drowning the roar of ocean and every sound besides! When he had done his song—'

'But am I not to hear his song?' asked Maude, with a little shudder.

'Oh, certainly, miss, if you like.'

'I like everything, Hugh; pray go on.'

'Very well, miss. I'll give it you.

"How wild and free
O'er the dark blue sea
Is the smuggler's roving life of liberty!
In chase or fight
Lies his heart's delight;
All his joys are on the dark blue sea.
Then away on the breeze's wing,
As the sparkling waters from our bows we fling
In spray, while the harp-winds ring
Through the sails and cordage merrily,
Merrily, merrily!
How wild and free
O'er the dark blue sea
Is the smuggler's roving life of liberty!
In chase or fight
Lies his heart's delight;
All his joys are on the dark blue sea.

No frozen land
Nor fair, sunny strand
Can hold their treasures from our conq'ring shot and brand.
Oh, they've many a tale
Of the stranger's sail,
And her gallant, lawless, roving crew.
Then here's to the Saucy Jane,
As she fearless trips it o'er the laughing main!
With a will to our good Sea-Queen again
Let the sparkling brimmer never stand,
Never stand, never stand!
How wild and free
O'er the dark blue sea
Is the smuggler's roving life of liberty!
In chase or fight
Lies his heart's delight;
All his joys are on the dark blue sea."

"Dark blue sea, gentlemen," said the Great Sea-King. The applause was deafening.'

'Was Trebraith among them?' asked she.

'You will see, miss. "Boys," a smuggler shouted, "the lotion's done; in the language of the poet 'it is no more!' The next thing is to—"

"Subside!" bellowed a hoarse, red-faced, pimple-nosed old Sea-King. "Who is no more? rum if it is; *ex*-cuse me, hand a bucket; who's afraid? A song, or a bucket, and take your choice —noways 'tickler. I do both;" saying which he drank off a bucket of the raw spirits without a wink. Taking a long breath he cried out, "Now, Jack Spriggles, cum an' av it hout; you've bin a-winkin' at me up to this ere werry blessed minit." Turning suddenly, he encountered the ghastly gaze of Trebraith; pointing at him he cried, "Ah, we knows, Billy; how about that ere fifty pound? hout with it now."

'Billy hung his guilty head in silence; the tables commenced to shake—a rumbling sound proceeded from underneath the cavern. The pimple-nosed old Sea-King shouted in terror, "Oh, Sea-Kings all! what has he done to make the earth so tremble?" The cavern whirled round and round; Billy began to rise high in the vaulted roof, while all looked on in eager expectation. "The flower is broken!" screamed a haggard witch, in garb of deepest black, descending from an opening in the roof. Pouncing on Billy, she led him off in anger, covering him with her beard.

"Oh, where is Billy going?" cried the veteran smuggler in trembling tones.

"Trememdon's rose is blighted!" shrieked a sister witch in garb of greenish hue, applying her blazing torch to Billy's nostrils, which lighted instantly, her long white beard fanning the flame.

"What!" vociferated all the smugglers, in horror and dismay, in one grand chorus of voices.

'Amid a solemn silence a hissing sound was heard above them all. Sea-birds flew round and round, and, darting wildly at the flame issuing from the wrecker's nostrils, a voice was heard to say, "The rose of Old Trememdon!"

'And now the Great Sea-King advanced; while breathless silence reigned, he said in husky tones,

"Oh, Sea-Kings all, we are a wicked race! Ah! from our births e'en to our graves we are the same! Our deeds of violence and infamy are known; but, oh! we're not so cursed but that we all denounce thee, Billy! What say ye, men?"

'The uproar and confusion were now terrible.

"We all denounce thee, Billy!" was heard from every voice in solemn chorus.

'Then the Great Sea-King cried,

"Sea-Kings arise! Quick! Save him; he burns! he's rising fast! Oh, save him from our hell!"

'And all the smugglers leapt into the air to clutch at Billy, flames of livid hue coming from their nostrils.

"He'll damn our very hell!" hissed they.

'But you are frightened, miss?' said Hugh.

'Go on, I pray,' said the soldier's little daughter, trembling from head to foot.

Chapter XIV.

'How fares the man on whom good men would look
With eyes where scorn and censure combated;
But that kind Christian love hath taught the lesson
That they who merit most contempt and hate
Do most deserve our pity.'—*Old Play.*

All was still as death in Ralph's chamber. His lamp was still burning on the table just where he used to write. His papers were lying all about as he had left them. I hovered near and glanced at them; each word was written down. I found a copy in the rough. Ah, then, he meant to publish it! He had got as far as, 'Then I must sell out and break my poor moth—' The rough copy was old; it bore a heading, 'In account with Messrs. Leach and Filchem,' and had been written in Undone city. It went on thus: '—er's heart! And who was he, that tall, commanding fellow, with handsome, gunpowdery eyes? A glance revealed it all. The Philistines had got him—oh, can I write?—my dear friend Reginald in their toils!'

I mused. 'That was the link—her brother.'

The narrative proceeds: ''Tis he! I thought I must speak out. As for me, my cup of wretchedness is full to overflowing. I am alone!—torn by cruel fate from her! but he!—ah, two short months ago I could have helped him; but now they'd mock, and cry, "You help him! Be off with you, you are CLEARED OUT!"'

* * * * * * *

'Seventeen thou, nine hundred and fifty-five to the bad this "account,"' said this broker on the Undone Vortex to Viscount Playfair, as he sat at his low table, in that innermost further room, whose sanctity I had just invaded. The sorrow-stricken young Guardsman had not noticed me. The cool-headed Vortex broker, as he sat before his big ledger, twirling his incipient moustache, looked more unconcerned than would, say, a tailor in a West-end shop taking the measure of his handsome young customer for a suit of regimentals. There would have been this difference, however—that the latter would have

been nappy in the consciousness of being about to render honest service for a just recompense!

The young Viscount had been begging for no consideration at his broker's hands. One glance at his disdainful features showed that. I retired at once. Hailing a hansom, he was soon out of sight and nearly as soon forgotten.

'I've just seen Playfair driving off,' cried a new comer in a loud voice. 'I hailed him; he wouldn't pull up—damn him!'

It was Maxwell, who proceeded to launch into a stream of invective against non-paying clients.

'Playfair's right enough,' interrupted his broker. 'Look here,' and he showed him a legal document just signed by the Viscount, and attested by his clerk; 'he'll have to sell out, though,' grinned he, 'and is gone straight to do it; no occasion for the Attachment now. It's all his father's too; Playfair wouldn't speculate for the world, not he! hia, ha! hia, hia, ha! ha!' and he grinned immensely.

'Sell out! hia, ha!' hissed Maxwell, in a brutally unfeeling manner; 'of course. I told him he must. More fool he to go security for his governor—hia! hia, ha!' And Walter chuckled more savagely than ever I had seen him. 'Don't he speculate? Should think not; no, ho! Ah! that's right! Ro-ho, brothers, ro-ho! you know?'

Clapping his hands and thighs alternately, he proceeded, in a voice husky with a species of uncontrollable and low guttural laughter, 'That's right—should say so—don't do nuffin for nuffin; must keep your eyes open—hia! hia! ha! ha! ha! Let's see, that makes seventeen—thirty thou—over fifty thou of Playfair's paid for the Marquis! stumped up in as many days as thous—ha! ha! hia! ha! hia! ha!' And Walter gurgled forth, 'What's that to you and me so long as we both get half the "coms," *besides the rest!*—hia! hia! ha! ha! And,' added he, sinking his voice to a whisper, 'I net more than four thou over that little job. I wish all my clients were as good pay as Playfair!'

'You'll choke me before long,' chuckled this broker; 'you've done me no end of good already—hia! ha! ha!'

'Shall we get the money sharp?' asked Walter, with a horrible grin, speaking through his closed teeth.

No response being forthcoming, the conversation ran upon the great number of young fellows who had been similarly 'cleared out,' and the consequent falling off of business therefrom; and I was glad enough to get out of that broker's office, wondering however I had got in, and reach Goodheart's after my fruitless errand.

After Ralph left, so tradition states, their glee ran so high that they ordered in a dozen of champagne, and in the midst of their merriment, the party having somewhat increased in numbers, they commenced to sing. There is a legend afoot also that a duet was sung between a jobber and a broker, as follows:

'Come, boys, we're making money every hour,
Put down your books—the clock is striking four.
By Jove! we never shall be short of tin
While "outside" fools will let us take 'em in.
Chorus. For we are bulling jobber-thieves! Hurrah! hurrah
And we are bearing broker-robbers. Hurrah! hurrah!

'To-morrow we must get in their good graces,
Assume, with button-holes, bland, smiling faces.
If *Th' Age* won't help us, we must try another,
Or buy them all up—'twould save lots of bother.
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'Let's start a paper—'twould sell well in Undone.
The *Do-'em-easy*—that sounds like a great gun
To gull the public! well, we'd sell it cheaply,
And circulate it broadly, widely, deeply.
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'The public are such asses! Let us do it
They'll quickly follow when we've fixed unto it
The stamp of th' "Undone Vortex" on the cover;
So say the word, nor stop to think it over.
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'Our deeds are dark and secret! 'twould be folly
To let "outsiders" in. Oh, ain't it jolly!
They're in our toils, we know; we'll keep 'em there too,
And revel in the wealth which they are heir to.
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'We'll put good "leaders" in our new Sensation,
T'allure the "outside" fools of this old nation!
We'll rob them right and left—the while grow fatter.
So long as we get rich, what does it matter?
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'How shall we "cater"? 'Coz no go's the Syndicate;
The people are big fools, but yet are too irate
To swallow every bait. Too fast they're growing
Au fait at "footballs," "rigs," and bubble-blowing!
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'True, true, my brother-jobbers, soon may tighten
The money market. Meantime, haste to Triton;
Turn inside out *The Grand*, while tipping waiters,
Astonish *demoiselles*, their *mas* and *paters*.
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'I'm on, my brother brokers! Ain't it fine, O?
When there, we've always got to tip the rhino.
What's that to fellas who are game to win it
At rate of cent per cent each blessed minute?
Chorus. For we are, &c.

'So now good-night, my boys; we'll meet to-morrow,
And 'tice young gamesters on to steal or borrow
To satisfy *our* greed! while many a furrow
Is traced on aged brow—burnt in with sorrow!
Jobbers' } For we are jolly bulling jobber-thieves. Hurrah! hurrah!
Chorus. } And we are jolly bulling jobber-thieves!
Brokers' } For we are jolly bearing broker-robbers. Hurrah! hurrah!
Chorus. } And we are jolly bearing broker-robbers!'

Chapter XV.

'What, though the field be lost!
All is not lost; th' unconquerable will
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield.'—Milton.

It was a fine October morning. Suddenly a clang of music burst upon the ear. Horses started, or careered in wild, excited movement. Boys shouted, men hurrahed, and girls waved their pocket-handkerchiefs and parasols. Flags fluttered in the breeze, while stalwart men were to be seen carrying huge banners. The effect was indescribable. 'Down with the Vortex!' shouted a lusty Heartshire man. 'No more Vortex Committee!' hundreds of hearty Undone citizens proclaimed, while cries of 'Down with the Villains!' 'Smash up the Blood-suckers!' 'National Stock and Share Market!' &c. &c., rent the air.

Men with placards on their backs paraded Foreigner's Square. On one was printed in huge red characters upon a black ground, 'I was ruined by the Beloved Silver Mine!' On another, 'The Metal Mountains Debenture Swindle haunts me to my grave!' A third proclaimed 'Avaunt Wee Countree Public Robbery Company!' while a fourth declared 'Ha, Backaway hath taken me in, yea, verily!' Another huge placard, of a similar character, announced 'A bas les Vampyres!' It was carried by four natives of the Polite Countree, who had been turned out of their residences in Foreigner's Square by Todigrab's executors, the rents on his contiguous property having risen so.

'Well, Locock,' said Joshua Strange, meeting Sir Manfred the same morning in Undone city, 'am glad to see you looking so well.'

'Ah, Mr. Strange,' replied Sir Manfred, speaking for the world in general, 'don't joke! We none of us look too well, or feel so, either. If I only had a better appetite now, or could get more sleep' (Sir M. retired regularly by ten now), 'or had a less active brain,—ah, what poor creatures we are!'

'Come now,' replied Joshua; 'I don't think you should complain; really you look the picture of health.'

'If I had only put on an extra flannel, for the wind is in the East, and oh—'

Sir Manfred felt for his knee-cap, and vowing that the other one was also getting out of place from force of sympathy, and the injured one was gone altogether, said he must see his doctor at once. Upon being reminded by his friend of his engagement to preside at a public meeting, they hailed a hansom and drove off to Loud Park together, Joshua feeling inwardly savage all the time that a man like Sir Manfred, who, having an almost unlimited range over Nature's fields and pastures gay, looked as well and hearty as a buck in consequence, should invariably be found ready to indulge his humour for a good grumble whenever he met a friend, who, not being so highly favoured by fortune, really required the relaxation which fate had so liberally accorded the other.

The people were holding a meeting in the most fashionable park of Undone. A hundred 'House' telegraphs were soon at work; each word uttered was noiselessly transmitted to a hundred centres in the park. When the great centre cheered all cheered. I took my station in an old elm-tree, and implored them to be silent, but they were deaf to all entreaty. When they cheered, and the autumn leaves and branches came rattling down, I lost my hold and fell into a chink of the old elm-tree, which held me tight until they cheered again, when I was released. If one centre asked, and I heard but indistinctly, 'When your interests and theirs clash, shall yours—the People's—suffer?' all the centres asked the same. Again, 'Hear that widow's voice! She trusted the Committee. She is ruined, for the loan is unsaleable in the market! (Loud hootings.) Robbery made lawful! Multitudes become Dupes! Unparalleled audacity! False and unscrupulous statements! Fraud and wilful misrepresentations! Supposed sanctity of a Great Name! Ambassador from the Great Countree! (Cries of "Almighty dollar!" "Might with shame!" "Might with robbery!" &c.) A soldier, and *therefore a gentleman*, trusted by the multitude, who by him were led to their ruin. He serves the purpose of the hour—gracefully retires when the mischief's done. Too late! the ruin of the multitude

lies at his door, and yet his Countree keeps him in his proud position (Shame!) while he is courted everywhere. (A voice, "Oh, Brother Jonathan!" another, "How about his coadjutor?") Dead and gone, thank righteous Heaven,' said the speaker, who turned out to be Charles Markham; 'but listen, ye people! "with the reward of iniquity" he purchased the "field of blood." I hurl it on his grave—Aceldama! Bought,' continued he, in measured tones, 'with the price of Blood, even the Blood of his Victims. Shall he mock you in his grave? Will you not reconvey Aceldama to the survivors of this Great Betrayer of Innocence—this Despoiler of Youth—this Desolater of Homes?'

It is utterly beyond me to attempt to do justice to the scene which followed this striking appeal. I will not insult your understanding, sir, by making the attempt. The enthusiasm which broke in upon the display of this magnificent torrent of feeling was as unique as the sentiments uttered.

Many wished to speak, especially Sir Watt Scroughem, Bart., who was now a convert to the people's cause, and who was one of its foremost champions. He did begin, but all I could hear were the words, 'My noble friend, the late Marquis, whom chance threw in my way,—he had a kindly heart—a kindly beaming eye—and they did wonders; they live long, long after their possessor has mingled with the dust. A great and noble race is now laid low. You all loved the Marquis—you love him still. (Violent cries, "We do, we do—we love him still.") Your sense of justice used not to fail through the stormiest of the dark ages; shall it now? (Sensation.) Our Old Countree is proverbial for its hatred of injustice, oppression, cruelty, and unfair dealing. It is, and ever was, the proud champion of fair play and honourable dealing, whether in the field of politics, of commerce, or of internal polity. It yields, in its estimation and regard for the heroic virtues, to no nation in the world. This is no flattery. You cannot help yourselves. Once move the nation's mind,—its will,—and nothing ever yet dreamed of exceeds your enthusiasm. I am not simple enough to imagine,' continued Sir Watt, 'that the affairs of the world could be conducted without regard to those considerations arising out of the promptings of self-interest. But is that to say that all fine sentiments, all noble emotions, all chivalrous, kindly, genial feelings, are to be stamped out of our natures, and trodden under foot in our dealings with each other, and with those more especially who, by virtue of their position, can never hope to vie with us, in intelligence and information, regarding the concerns of life? Are poesy and passion to have no influence on the affairs

we call "business"? Are the crushing sorrows of the helpless dupe to go for ever unheeded? Who among you would refuse to assist a fellow-creature in the streets rendered helpless by reason of infirmity or age? To such, undoubtedly, you would be ready to extend a helping hand. Must it be said, then, that those unfortunates, whom some among you have helped to trample under foot and despoil, and who are leading lives of misery in consequence, are to be left to their wretched fates, while you pass calmly over on "to the other side"?'

I thought, sir, I had seen and heard everything. I had certainly wandered through Space without let or hindrance, but I never had yet heard such a ringing cheer as those few words called forth, nor discovered created beings with natures such as yours. That meeting was moved indeed, and their cheers were 'ringing clear as bells in winter.'

A resolution was put and carried unanimously, to petition Her Most Gracious Majesty the Queen of the Old Countree, in the same manner as the Houses of Parliament had been before. It is needless to say that this was done with acclamation.

Owing to a happy thought, Sir Manfred proposed the following Resolution, which was carried atmospherically: 'That in the opinion of this meeting it is most earnestly desirable to obtain the Whispering Agency of the Spectre' (enormous cheering, which lasted—I couldn't help it, sir—on and off, thirty-five minutes; I did feel sad, knowing how soon I should have to leave those dear Old Countree-ans), 'to influence the hearts of the Women of the Old Countree towards bringing about the great object we have in view.'

And I danced about in mid-air—how I loved them all—rattling my old limbs again in a vain attempt to convince them that my approval was secured. In one moment more I was floating away on the still autumn air, while the warm halo of myriads of true hearts pervaded every Spectral sense. I resolved even to out-do myself and deserve their hearty approbation. Breathing to the park-keeper as I flitted by, 'Mum's the word, you know; but the Spectre is all there,' I was about to steer off into Space, but on second thoughts I said, 'No, tell 'em I like 'em—I will!'

And they all came away so jolly; and it was telegraphed and trumpeted and blasted around, for there were at least a dozen bands upon the spot; and before night it was known in every town and village in the Old Countree, and many others too, that I, the Spectre, was going to see the Women of the Old Countree, and was—all there!

And when the Undone Vortex Committee heard all that had happened, they were very wroth indeed. They held several meetings as before, in the Committee-room. They fretted, some strutting about with their hands in their pockets, looking big. Many got very red in the face and fumed, cursing their victims (not the Saints! these sang, as will presently be seen), and storming at intervals. But, as was to have been expected, as far as the inhabitants were concerned, they did nothing. The Saints assembled around the luncheon table, the Committee-meeting having been convened unusually early, and champagne corks began to fly. They drank, and looked at each other suspiciously; they then got white in the face, many of them, which was a sign that something unusual was coming off. Retiring to a corner of the Committee-room, they sang a long hymn together, which St. Peter Gallwood gave out, two lines at a time, the burden of which was thus rendered by a good-natured porter, who listened at the keyhole of the inner of the two double doors. Here it is:

(*piano.*) 'Oh, smile Thou in Thy place above
Upon Thy naughty people;
And put us up to every "move,"
While climbing th' heavenly steep hill.

CHORUS.

(*forte.*) Come, jolly, jolly Committee-boys! every one!
(*piano.*) Hush! mum's the word—now listen!
(*cres.*) That's how it's done!

(*agit.*) The wicked send their darts abroad,
But with Thine help we'll smash 'em:
(*forte.*) Oh, pierce them with Thy vengeful sword,
(*cres.*) Or "bulls," or "bears"—'twill catch 'em.

FID-FAD'S CHORUS.

(*forte.*) Come, jolly, jolly Committee-boys! all in here are one!
(*dim.*) Saints and Sinners know the trick—
(*piano.*) Hush! (*cres.*) That's how it's done!

(*agit.*) We always wait on Providence—
(*piano.*) At least we let 'em think so;
Nought answers like the real pretence,
(*cres.*) The real thing's always—no go!

SAINTS' CHORUS.

Come, jolly, jolly, &c.

(*forte.*) Now bless us, Lord! shatter the foes
Of Thy own peaceful chosen!
(*piano.*) We'll meekly smile, nor interpose
The while the battle goes on.

GENERAL CHORUS.

(*forte.*) Come, jolly, jolly, &c.

(*piano.*) And whilst we wallow midst the pelf,
Which from Thy foes we're stealing;
(*agit.*) Grant feeble visions of Thyself,
(*cres.*) Lest GOLD should sear past feeling!

SAINTS' CHORUS.

Come, jolly, jolly, &c.

Of Spoils which thus Thine enemies
Yield to Thy chosen people,
One tithe we'll give as sacrifice—
'Twill build our chapel's steeple!

GENERAL CHORUS.

(*forte.*) Come, jolly, jolly Committee-boys! every one!
Let's all join hands—we know the trick!
That's how it's done!

(*cres.*) Nine-tenths we'll hoard! Avaunt, then, fears!
We are Thine own Appointed.
(*piano.*) Smile on each "bull"! Beam on all "bears"
(*agit.*) With heavenly grace anointed!

SAINTS' CHORUS.

Come, jolly, jolly, &c.

(*agit.*) Oh! could our course like cycles move,
(*cres.*) We'd ne'er be flabberghasted!
But sure return to Vortex-groove,
(*forte.*) Which we've so deeply tasted.

GENERAL CHORUS.

Come, jolly, jolly, &c.

con expres.) If, Lord of Love! Thou from above
Would'st us Thy people cherish;—
(*cres.*) Each "dodge" we know, and every "move"—
(*forte.*) —We'd laugh at those who perish!

GENERAL CHORUS.

(*cres.*) Come, jolly, jolly Committee-boys! each lucky one!
(*piano.*) Hush! mum's the word—(*cres.*) you're listening?
(*forte.*) That's how it's done!'

'Chorus again, boys!' shouted a voice, which I have reason to suspect was the Vice-chairman's. 'Thus!' said he; but all knew it, and joining hands, they sang heartily,—

(*agit.*) 'Come, frisky, 'cute Committee-boys! each plucky one!
(*dim.*) Hush! "on" we are!—(*piano.*) d'ye know the trick?
Sh!—(*forte.*) That's how it's done!'

CHAPTER XVI.

'Aid yourself an' God will aid you.'

MAUD TREVOSA had very little difficulty in persuading Billy Trebraith to give her the reticule; for on the first symptom of disobedience to her demand she threatened in a menacing manner

to fill his house with the Queen's officers, and he gave it up in the same condition as he had got it the night before, the conscience-stricken wrecker now forcing into her hands the fifty pounds he had received for 'doing the job,' and giving her all the information in his power.

Rejoining Hugh, who had concealed himself in the low sand hills to the rear within call, they were quickly back in the village. Bidding every one a hasty farewell, little Maude was soon *en route* for Undone city, examining each article in the reticule as she went along. Several letters from Lady Beatrice to herself, none of which had been posted, a cheque, signed "Ralph Osborne," for a hundred thousand pounds falling out of one of them, several more from Maxwell to Geraldine, written in very confidential terms, disclosing the whole of the plot, with Geraldine's card case, comprised the important items it contained. She read an unopened letter from Lady Beatrice to herself, which was to advise her when the final step would be irrevocably taken; that at length the great opportunity she had at one time so ardently desired, of proving her great love, had arrived; that nevertheless she was well-nigh heart-broken, her great consolation being that her dear father would soon be reinstated, as one of her lover's first acts would be directed towards the accomplishment of that great object. She had added a postscript, 'Don't you hate money now? I'm sure you do.' When the cheque for that fabulous sum tumbled into Maude's lap she sighed, 'What a demon! a forger, too. I never liked him, nor Geraldine either; whose is the money now?'

It was not long before she had the large sum placed to her account at the 'Undone and Westward Bank.' Mr. MacEvoy was politeness itself to little Maude.

'Please keep the cheque safely, Mr. MacEvoy,' said Maude, 'as much may depend upon it; do you require a lawyer's letter to that effect?'

Mr. MacEvoy smiled and said, 'Not at all,' and they parted on capital terms.

Proceeding immediately to Maxwell's office, she recognised her young Fernland friend, Tom Doowell, but her veil being down he took Geraldine's card in to Mr. Clencher without a word of acknowledgment.

'I'm in a great hurry, Mr. Clencher,' said Maude, when the door was closed; 'I'm fairly overcome. Walter has left without Me! Did you ever hear of such a thing? it makes my blood boil to think of it. Girls never swear—at least, they oughtn't—but I feel—'

Iesitating for a moment, Raskall helped her out by saying, 'Pray compose yourself, my dear young lady; you really are Miss Ogilvy?' (a pause); 'we're obliged to be so very particular in business.'

Maude answered Clencher with a look which told him plainly she was not to be trifled with. Then drawing out one of Maxwell's letters to Geraldine, she opened it carelessly, saying, 'So stupid of him not to name the town, village, or whatever it is—perhaps he didn't know himself!'

This was sufficiently convincing. Clencher handed her the address, and bowed her out very profoundly.

* * * * * * *

'Just arrived?' asked Maude, of a cut-throat-looking fellow, in the dark old Hall of Macgloom Castle.

'Yes,' replied he.

'What name?'

'Jack Spriggles.'

'Smuggler?' asked little Maude, quick as thought.

'Ye—ye—yes.'

'Do you know Trebraith?'

'Ye—ye—yes, miss.'

'Don't be frightened, Jack; how far's the Viper out?'

'Better nor half a mile, miss,' replied Jack; 'I'm no afeared, but—'

'But what, Jack?' asked Maude, and seeing him look very disconcerted and miserable, she said, 'Well, never mind; can't you bring the other men here, too? No, stay, Jack; how is *she?*' asked Maude, scarcely above a whisper.

He hung his head and was silent.

'Is she there?' asked Maude, looking him full in the face.

I see the brawny, dark-visaged, cut-throat fellow, even now, as, sobbing like any girl, he replied in a voice husky with emotion, 'Yes, yes, miss—but, oh, God! miss,'—and then broke off. Little Maude stood beside him, trembling with emotion, her hand raised to her forehead, the swarthy smuggler crying out between stifled sobs, 'He is a damned villain!'

'I know—I know—but She,' cried little Maude.

Chapter XVII.

'So live that, when thy summons comes to join
The innumerable caravan which moves
To that mysterious realm where each shall take
His chamber in the silent halls of death—
Thou go . . . . .
Like one that . . . .
. . . lies down to pleasant dreams.'

BRYANT.

The moment he awoke after that night when he first became conscious of the greatness of his humiliation and sorrow, Ralph rose, and began to put on his clothes, saying, in a hurried, absent way, 'Tell me, am I near? is she here? I am going to see her.' Old Betty, informing the doctor, who immediately appeared, Ralph said, looking Macjoy in the face, 'I'm off to see her; which is the way? You know I love her; oh, help me! I'm going to say adieu.' His manner was calm, and his air impressive; every trace of excitement was gone. 'I'll—I'll—ah, why don't you help me?' He now talked like a child; then asked quite slowly, 'Will—you—help me? help—me—to—go?'

He confronted his friend with blanched face and trembling lips. 'My boy, my boy!' was all Macjoy could utter.

'I know I oughtn't to go,' he said, in plaintive tones; 'but then she loves me so! and I,' his manner changed again, as he said excitedly, 'it must come; so while I have the strength—oh, 'tis womanish! all this; where is she now? Macjoy!'

His eye glittered as he shrieked his friend's name. Tremblingly Macjoy begged him to sit down. Throwing the doctor off with the little strength left, he cried,—

'Never till I have seen her—only once! ah, you wouldn't have me go without seeing her once—you, Macjoy! Away from her!

'"Away to live—unseen, unknown.
Thus unlamented let me die;
Steal from the world, and not a stone
Tell where I lie"—thus—thus to die!'

He paused.

'What's that you say?' shrieked the boy in suddenness and fright.

* * * * * * *

His scream had been so piercing that I had flitted off; it was unearthly; and, fearing he was not long for your world, I was not desirous of being present, having a vivid sense still left of all

the accompaniments of the passage. I ventured shortly, however, to return. Macjoy must have told him something that I had not heard. No doubt it had become essential to restrain him from leaving the house in his then state of health; and as a last resource the sad facts had been communicated.

'Who? I'll murder him!' I heard him sob.

Macjoy seized the poor boy's hand in his. 'You will not murder your broth—'

'My brother Walter!' gasped the boy, his face changing to a livid colour, while his eyes started from their sockets. He looked around the room. In the furthest corner stood an ancient cabinet, with bows and spears of Fernland warfare. Ralph spied a barbed spear; he struggled to extricate himself from his friend's grasp.

'Come—*pray!*' implored his friend Macjoy, his hot tears falling fast.

'His blood—his blood!' he shrieked frantically.

Summoning all his little remaining strength, with the violence of a madman, he flung himself half across the room, and fell senseless on the floor.

Chapter XVIII.

'Is it for this the Spanish maid, aroused,
Hangs on the willow her unstrung guitar,
And, all unsex'd, the anlace hath espoused,
Sung the loud song, and dared the deed of war?'—Byron.

Little Maude had only just been in time at the bank that morning.

'Nothing like doing your business yourself, my little lady,' said the manager to her before leaving. A clerk had just arrived from Maxwell's to stop the cheque! The amount, however, was already placed to her credit, she had signed her name in a big book, and was in possession of Mr. MacEvoy's receipt!

'This cheque is considerably "ante-dated," as we say in business,' continued he.

'I got the letter containing it after "business hours,"' said she archly.

'I see,—I see,' pursued he gaily; 'the money's yours, the cheque is ours. Nothing like doing business in your own way,—oh, and—early! ha, ha, ha!'

A few minutes after, a bustle might have been heard in the

outer office adjoining that in which Maude Trevosa and Raskall Clencher were then tête-à-têteing.

'Too late !—you don't mean it !' exclaimed Tom Doowell.

'I do though; girl in at time—such a fizzer !' said young Sharpiers; 'I heard the head chap say, "It sha'n't !" and I waited till she passed.'

'Why didn't you come at once ?' bullied Tom.

'Not a bit of use coming !' said Sharpiers, with a sneer; 'besides, hadn't I to go to Drownemall's for the *Official List ?* By jingo ! if that ain't the very gal herself !' exclaimed he.

'Don't pinch a fellow's arm if it is !' holla'd Tom.

'I'll swear it is,' said the other, as Maude passed them, still disguised as before.

Sharpiers was off his stool in a moment. Opening the door, he closed it gently after her; then opened it as gently, and in another minute had returned to confirm the news. The excitement was great. Clencher had neglected his business; there would be a fearful row when Maxwell knew of it ! Clencher would have to leave ! Oh, it was excellent fun ! The poor boys were ordered hither and thither to no purpose, Raskall cursing them for his own forgetfulness, which they swore was too bad. And little Maude was far on her road to the station by the time the lads had calmed down sufficiently to enjoy the jokes they now cracked on the whole affair !

Judging by the pile of letters on her table at Macgloom Bay, Maude had not been idle. She invariably began the day, wet or dry, with a ride on the sands, which were extensive and picturesque, practising pistol-shooting on horseback and on foot, asking herself why were not women taught these things. At the expiration of two hours devoted to this pastime, she would generally contrive to work herself up to the boiling point, and come home fuming, and muttering, as she was divesting herself of her incumbrances:

'Let any one dare stand between us, my love, when once I get near you; I'll fire, I'll stick, I'll run them through,—all—everybody,—but I'll find you, love !'

She had once thought about the police, but had dismissed the idea as unworthy of a moment's consideration. 'They never find a thing out on shore, and generally get the wrong man,' said Maude; 'they don't often find the right. The police catch them, indeed ! besides, they're at sea. The police ! oh !'

Chapter XIX.

'Nothing is impossible to a willing mind.'

Old Betty was in despair, for Ralph Osborne would not come to. The room had been metamorphosed: curtains, pictures, and hangings were all removed, and the walls were now adorned with artificial evergreens and flowers instead, for Macjoy had ransacked his brain to extemporise simple and pleasing scenery, which would, on his patient's waking, call to mind other thoughts, and tend to efface the memory of the past. But Ralph wanted keeping up, his Doctor said, and he would assuredly sink unless some change immediately occurred. For several days he had been in the same half-conscious state; and I heard Macjoy telling Betty it could not possibly last much longer.

'Nor shall it last another hour!' said a voice, which Betty immediately recognised as Harry's. It was some time before Macjoy could bring himself to believe that the man before him was the gay young Bungaland soldier; but he thought he would turn his presence to account. Surmising that his sudden appearance might serve as a salutary shock to his patient,—it could not possibly be productive of harm now,—he begged him to come to his friend's side.

Betty was in tears, and sat at Ralph's bedside, with her spectacles on, reading her Bible; Somers stood by her side; and Macjoy next to him. All was so silent that Death might have been there! What was it vibrated in the air, causing them all to start? Ralph had not stirred, and yet an indefinable something had taken possession of them, for Betty had ceased to read, and the others looked from the one to the other with an air of startled expectancy. Not a word had been spoken. There was now, however, a movement in the bed, and Ralph, who had scarcely stirred for days, uttered distinctly the words, 'I hear!' The air seemed dense to suffocation, yet the windows were wide open, and the Autumn breezes playing within the room! For several seconds they remained thus motionless. At length Somers raised his dark bared arm aloft, while the perspiration stood upon his brow. They now heard, in trembling accents:

''Tis there again!' All was silent, while the patient seemed to breathe his soul to her! 'Beatrice,' he said, in tenderest accents, 'speak once again! Oh, answer me! murmur one faint sigh before I'm gone! give me one parting glance! Oh, for one wild embrace,—one maddening delight!'

He seemed disturbed, for Betty was sobbing by his side. She checked herself, and he proceeded in the same earnest strain, while they listened in wondering silence:

'Speak, Birdie, love! Your soul and mine are one! United by a bond—so deep, so true—which ne'er can be dissolved! Ah, Beatrice, my soul cries loud to thee! Send me one brief response, which, wafted quick through Space, shall soothe my soul's depart!'

They stood entranced, while sweetest strains of music fell upon the ear. A voice was heard to sing with thrilling pathos, midst the solemn silence:

'Foul fiends may true hearts sever,
  But *Love* can ne'er destroy;
Your soul, so true, shall ever
  Be linked with mine in joy!
Come, loved one, with me stay!
  Waft me one thrilling kiss!
Our loves can ne'er decay
  Through never-ending bliss.
. . . never-ending . . .'

The wondrous cadences still vibrated, but the voice had ceased. Somers alone appeared unmoved. They stood aside. Ralph started up in bed—his listless look was gone.

'Hark!' he said triumphantly, as if he had seen them but an hour ago, 'you heard,—there again!' he pointed up, with changed and radiant look, 'you hear,—now!—now, again,—listen!'

The young Marquis now entered, followed by his brother. 'Poor fellow!' said he quietly; 'but 'tis his mind,—sad, sad indeed!'

Ralph whispered, 'Hush! now, no more! 'Twas hers!' Reaching out his hand, he whispered, 'Alfred!'

He gazed upon them calmly, while Macjoy placed his hand upon his arm, and anxiously counted the throbs of life. 'Fetch me the wine,—quick!' he said.

Sip after sip was swallowed eagerly. Tossing himself restlessly on the bed, he said—as though reasoning with some one close beside him:

'No, no,—come, loved one! or—shall I go?' Amid the silence he continued, 'Yes; I will go.' Smiling, he called aloud again, 'Alfred!' and when his friend came he whispered, 'give me more wine!' But Macjoy said, 'No.'

'Give me more wine, there's a dear fellow,' he cried, with warmth. Macjoy implored them not to speak, while all pressed round him.

'Some good, strong wine!' urged Ralph, in a cheerful voice.

Macjoy still said, 'No.' 'Here, take my hand and feel how brave it is,' he cried. 'Now, give me wine, Macjoy; don't look so at me!' He was so earnest, none could resist. 'Quick,—quick! I faint!'

With his own hands Lord Alfred gave the wine.

'There,—there!' he said, with faltering accents. 'She spoke to me! Trememdon's rose! Alfred, Alfred—dear Alfred!'

He sank back on his pillow, the brothers both encircling him with their arms. Harry and Macjoy stood silent by; while the poor old creature sobbed forth her gratitude on her knees, where she had been some time before.

Chapter XX.

'A sense of an earnest will
To help the lowly living,
And a terrible heart-thrill,
If you have no power of giving
An arm of aid to the weak,
A friendly hand to the friendless,
Kind words, so short to speak,
But whose echo is endless.'—Houghton.

Haini, the brave, wild half-caste girl,—fond of adventure, fonder of Ralph, and hating his brother with deadly hatred,—had, accompanied by her aunt, now established herself at dreary, gloomy, old Grim Castle. Harry Somers was her constant companion. They said but little; but they were soon familiar with every bay, stream, and headland in the neighbourhood. They tired out every horse, and wondered at the small amount of 'go' in all Old Countree horses.

Since his father's death, Reginald had put all his affairs into the hands of the eminent lawyers Bold and Bold, who instituted immediate proceedings against such of the Spoilers as could be reached, with a view to the restoration of his rights and property.

The B.D.V. was no longer a half-starved street orator, but once more a happy, contented farm labourer. Harry, aided by his faithful hound Lion, had sought for him far and wide. True to his nature, the dog had led him to the woods behind Grimmouth Castle. A stream had broken the scent. Just upon the point of giving up the search, Somers, descending a high wooded ridge by a long spur, thought he heard a voice below. Proceeding cautiously, and calling off his dog, the air being perfectly still, his ear caught the plaintive solemn sounds as of a man in urgent distress.

'Well,' said Harry, half-aloud, 'if that's a farm labourer's voice, "Backaway" hasn't much damaged it! Yet it must be the poor devil—listen!'

'Far from all Christians, far from my home,
Begging a sixpence—houseless I roam;
Penniless I wander about through the day,
With dead wife and children far, far away!

No one will help me, no one will love,
Vampyres ne'er pity their dupes in distress!
Wifeless and childless, wildly I rove,
Ah, ne'er again shall I feel their caress!'

Flowrets may blossom, but I dread to see
Them bowing their proud heads while mocking at me!
And music of youth, which I loved from my birth,
But laughs at the wand'rer on God's beauteous earth!'

'Not such music as yours!' sighed Harry; 'poor fellow!'

The man, if man it was, stopped for a moment, apparently exhausted, while the ocean murmured feebly at his feet.

'Who can it be?' mused Somers. 'What music, too!'

In the same plaintive, thrilling tones, which reverberated from woodland copse to heathery hollow, the voice continued:

'Drives me mad, for I know I am friendless and poor!'

The whole of the remainder was uttered in tones of excited, quivering violence, mingled with an air of triumph, making quite a contrast to the sweet cadences of the former notes; it went on:

'Ha, ha! the Destroyer has knocked at the door!
And now all is o'er, for no help can come
To aid the Despoiler, who has found *his* last home!'

While the voice was uttering these words, the leaves shook upon the trees, without the faintest breath of air stirring.

'What Spirits are about?' cried Harry. 'Who laughed, too, in that wild manner when I heard the words about the Destroyer? I did not,—yet I heard—' He stopped, for again:

'Oh, where shall I go? now, what must I do?
Will my Great Creator this wand'rer pursue?
Me—weary and footsore! me—hungry and weak!
Deprive me of shelter His Vengeance to wreak!

The Great Friend of Justice—will He frown on me
For ridding His world of a Villain? Not He!
If so, I'll e'en wander till Death to me comes,
And try help poor wretches they've spoiled of their homes!'

'"And the rich He hath sent empty away"!' cried Somers,

now excited beyond measure, in a voice that would have startled the dead. I flitted to the poor B.D.V., and gazed in astonishment! True, he was there, but seemed only to be just awaking from a heavy sleep. Though his eyes were sunken, bloodshot, and expressionless, and his countenance wore a sickly, pallid hue, yet he appeared conscious of some inward joy. It was at once evident that he had been singing nothing. It was some one else, then. The Soldier-Hercules was soon beside him; but none too soon. The B.D.V. looked up in agony, thinking it was an officer of justice, but Somers quickly reassured him; and then he tried to speak, but trembled so he soon broke down. Somers had been out all day in search of him, and had but little brandy left. He poured it down the B.D.V.'s throat, and indeed he needed it. Before night he was safely housed and cared for. Who had sung so sweetly, and where that heavenly music came from, I never yet could tell.

* * * * * * *

Haini had just received a telegram from Maude. She read it to Harry Somers.

'Macgloom Bay, North Countree.—Birdie is alive! Hurrah! thank God! She's in a trance. Steamer caught fire; villain drunk in his cabin—so it's supposed—horrible discovery made by Birdie! Fainted,—has never spoken again,—low fever! Oh, Haini, think (will telegrams give expression? I'll pay double to convey mine!), Beast took fright! put in here,—got funky (rather unlady-like) of me!—fancy, LITTLE ME! (*con expressione*). Oh, I fear I shot too much! He's off again! Keep double look-out all along the coast! Keep your powder dry,—sharpen your dagger! Thrust home, and spare not! (*con much expressione.* Is that right?)'

To which Haini replied:

'Right! No news! Strike home,—spare not!'

The whole of Harry's people, being imbued with his spirit, had put by all their earnings, and purchased a large, wide-beamed pinnace, mounting five swivel guns.

Chapter XXI.

Glen. 'I can call spirits from the vasty deep.'
Hot. 'Why, so can I, or so can any man,
But will they come when you do call for them?'
SHAKESPEARE.

Sir Oswald Slasher's seat, Crashum Hall, in the county of Oakshire, was an uncommonly jolly place; for Sir Oswald was one of the right sort. He was modelled after the type of the jolly old Marquis of Trememdon, in all particulars save one. No Parasite—no Sycophant or Hanger-on—from the Undone City Vortex had ever wormed its way into the bosom of his family, and brought it, with its withering blight, to that frightful abyss of ruin and misery, which, like a scourge, had marked the fatal course of the one from the day of its introduction to the hour of its utter collapse!

And now the old hall was the home of the little Marchioness and the Ladies Eleanor and Gertrude. As the old baronet sat in their midst, the group resembling so many children more than grown-up people, Lady Slasher went straight up to the Marchioness, seized her tiny, reproachful hands and kissed them as she raised them to her own neck and shoulders while she pressed her to her warm, kind, generous heart. The old man left them and joined Oswald at the further end of the room.

'What,' I overheard him say, 'the Viper!'

'Hush!' said Oswald, 'the Women!'

'Has she been heard of?' asked the old man *sotto voce.*

'Put into a port of the Polite Countree's for coals—and off again.'

'By G—! where's that half-caste cousin? where's—'

'Haini's a lioness. Maude's braving it at Macgloom. Ah, you should have heard how she got in there, feigning to be Geraldine; 'twas capital! and now she has them all under her thumb.'

'I tell you what, Oswald, those girls are treasures. What's in that Osborne to make 'em all so mad upon him? One up there, another down there, and a third on the sea—it's wonderful!'

'Ralph's a very decent fellow,' said Oswald warmly.

'They say he's dying, and I don't wonder. How came he to fall in with Lord Alfred at Westernport?' asked the baronet.

'Ralph's all right again. I never saw such a fellow. I met him in the city; he's full of life. He's going to hunt his broker down; he looks most terrible!'

'Terrible! how?'

'Ah, if you only knew Ralph as I do you would not ask. A man so sensitive I never met before, and so wound up in her; and yet to be so calm—'tis truly wonderful! Ah, he's quite altered!'

'I'm not surprised,' said the old man thoughtfully.

'Ralph says she is all right, and something about a dream or vision too; and now he says if he could make ten millions on the Vortex, at one stroke, he would not touch it. I do believe it drove him mad, just for the time. How ever he got to Westernport no one knows; he doesn't like to talk about it. From what I hear he was going to bid her adieu.'

'I'm not surprised,' said old Sir Oswald; 'get your friend here; he might have gone quite mad. I should, I know.'

'But everybody's getting Ralph; he talks of making a speech—'

'Speech—with that little darling flown! he must be mad!'

'But, father, you don't know Ralph; he says that she is in Heaven's keeping, and tells every one the same. Ralph's an uncommon sort of fellow—we are great friends, you know. His darling being flown won't make one bit of difference; it's wonderful!'

'But, Oswald,' returned his father, 'I think it's bound to make a lot of difference; it must; it would with me, I know. I say, my boy, we'll fit a fine, smart steamer out,' cried the old man, floods of tears streaming down his honest countenance, 'with half-a-dozen pets of guns on board, with whirr-i-agonal balls that smash up all creation before they've left the muzzle a'most, and she shall steam her thirty knots! You shall go in her.'

His son replied, 'With all my heart. I met Lord Alfred in the city; he's merrier than ever.'

'Merrier!' ejaculated the old man; 'then I don't know what "merry" means.'

'He is though; for Ralph heard little Birdie's voice in a kind of trance.'

'Birdie! Who's she?' asked Sir Oswald

'The rose of Old Trememdon—Lady Beatrice Playfair,' said Oswald; 'and ever since then his illness has left him; and now he is so changed—it's wonderful!'

'It is, very,' said the baronet.

Chapter XXII.

'——Friend Ralph, thou hast
Outrun the constable at last.'—Butler.

'Undone, January —.

'My dear Harry,—Get me a crib near you, old feller; then I can come in and talk o'nights; don't be sad. I love your form too well to think with equanimity of Harry's grief! I was gushing in my last. 'Twas all for effect—know me some day—and now do better than my best friends, who only see my devil, forgetting how near he is a seraph of the first water.

'Yours for aye,
'Ralph Osborne.

'Captain Harry Somers, &c. &c.'

Being thus apprised, the Soldier-gipsy kept a strict look-out for his friend.

* * * * * * *

'Aut Osborne aut nullus!' ejaculated a somewhat Ralphian voice at a certain railway station abutting on Undone city, within a very few hours of the meeting of the two friends noticed in the foregoing chapter. As Ralph was literally 'cleared out,' it was a matter for conjecture to many how he contrived to exist.

The train was on the point of starting. Ralph had not a coin in his pocket—not even the inevitable half-crown upon which so many fortunes have been built.

'You've heard of Birdie,' he said, as he jumped upon the engine, then in motion. Staring at the driver, who stared at him in turn, he seated himself complacently on the coke. 'I'm Ralph Osborne,' said he, 'and I've got no money. I love her so!'

The grimy, weather-beaten driver stood open-mouthed, gazing at him in silence.

'I'm all right here,' said Ralph, folding his arms and smiling at the driver and stoker both.

'Swell out of luck!' exclaimed the stoker, who had a goodish bit of heart beneath his dark casing.

The lad was so impetuous they could not think of giving him denial. The driver said,

'Why, Birdie's the girl that—'

'O'course; and damn the—'

'My noble swell, come here. Make room,' said Armstrong playfully, 'us must hide you 'fore us gets to Mackinton.'

'Here goes!' said Dick the stoker. And very soon Ralph lay low inside the tender all covered up with coke.

'A pair of jolly bricks!' cried Ralph. 'I sha'n't forget.'

He never did. And they never forgot Ralph Osborne.

At Westernport Ralph met a farmer. Said Ralph, 'I'm on for Old Trememdon. I don't know how to get there, though.'

'Ah, come along,' said Farmer Thorne, 'aw've left Trememdon. What's your name?'

'Pray what is yours?' asked Ralph.

'Aw'm Farmer Thorne,' said he.

'What, old Thorne! Why, I'm Ralph Osborne.'

The old man wept at hearing this.

'Aw cud na live wi' that ere Fleasum,' said he. 'Aw've got a farm in Lovesheer noo; so come along.'

Ralph Osborne and old Thorne started early the next day for Old Trememdon. When they had arrived within a few miles of the Castle, a farmer whom John Fleasum had put in as tenant called them off his land, as they rode sadly along. It was in the month of December.

'Us canna hurt his land,' said Farmer Thorne; 'the earth is God's; if He doant say nothin', why shud this ere fellow? There beant no young grasses a-comin' up.'

'Let's take the road,' said Ralph. 'I always give a farmer the benefit of the doubt. It may be up-hill work with him now, too; let's call upon him.'

They did so. The wife had two black eyes for having dared to disobey her *better* half. One child a broken head, another an arm, and a third a leg; all had black eyes!

'Ah, ah!' thought Ralph, 'the short and *striking* annals of the poor; but how unlike the olden days!' And beggars were now to be met soliciting alms, a thing unknown before.

Very soon Ralph wandered on the sea-girt shore of Bluffshire; and he was solitary, and began to feel depressed. I saw him lying at full length on his back, with his hat drawn over his eyes, meditating. Presently he heard footsteps close beside him. It was dusk, and Ralph, thinking it was one of Fleasum's mendicants, for the man began to address him, and being in no very good humour, turned away, saying in a surly tone,

'Oh, you be—; shut up. I did not come here for you to—'

A strong hand was laid upon his shoulder; he turned.

'Why, Somers!'

'Ralph!'

'I do believe I'm a perfect devil! What have I been saying just now?' cried Ralph in horror, at having mistaken his friend

for one of the late Spoiler's petitioners. Behind Harry was a young regiment of gipsies with Lord Allan Playfair at their head.

'Allow me to introduce my followers to the forlorn hope,' said Harry. 'Lord Allan, I hope you didn't hear my friend's "bad langwidge"; but it is excusable. These beggars are becoming a pest.'

The gipsies welcomed Ralph heartily, and Lord Allan greeted him most kindly.

After this I saw the two walking alone together. And Somers grasped Ralph's hand and was sad.

'I meant to guard her,' he said at length.

Ralph pressed his hand warmly; but he was thinking at the time about the words, 'He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.' 'Ah,' thought Ralph, 'but did He ever love? LOVE, I mean—madly—fondly—passionately. His nature was too noble for the world! Is a good life incompatible then with enjoyment of the world? Why these limbs, this heart, these passions? Did He, knowing so well our natures, urge us to do impossible things? Still my heart yearns towards Him in an inexpressible way—Him, the "man of sorrows"! Why these sorrows, this grief? I think I will tell Him of my great love for Birdie,—He seems so near to me now!'

The scene was most impressive. The sun had set behind a heavy cloud, which, on that coast especially, betokened foul weather, and the sea was getting up each moment. While the two were sitting there, Ralph realised, for the first time, that he was by the side of a man whom the world called murderer. Turning, he gazed intently upon him, fascinated by his noble, though fiery, cast of features.

'Ralph,' said Harry quietly; 'she was too beautiful.'

Ralph shuddered.

'She is safe, Ralph,' continued he, laying his hand upon his friend's arm. There was a mysterious air about Somers now which Ralph had never before observed.

'I know—I know; ah, yes, I know,' replied Ralph hurriedly.

The two were now reclining upon the pebbly beach.

'How often have I watched!' Harry exclaimed; 'my people too—all the coast along; and now I can foretell the winds—a—storm—a destiny! I will foretell,' said the tall gipsy, seizing Ralph's hand.

'What, my fortune?'

'Hush! a destiny,' said Somers solemnly; 'how dark it is! Changing,' muttered he. 'She has done this. We both revolve,

you well within, I just inside, her orbit; yours will be happiness supreme, mine more than I deserve.'

'And mine too,' quickly added Ralph. 'Harry, I always was looking for her.'

'Looking for her! how—where?' asked the gipsy.

'Oh, I cannot tell,' replied Ralph dreamily, 'everywhere. I knew she MUST exist! I loved her brother first, Harry, and she is his counterpart.'

'But,' said Somers excitedly, 'you cannot love her more than I do, and yet—'

He stopped; Ralph gazed into his countenance earnestly. 'And yet Birdie loves me, you mean,' said his friend.

'I do,' replied the other; 'but she has changed me, and now I live upon— Ah, Ralph, I pain you! tell me, do I?' asked Harry, with rising emotion.

'No—no!' ejaculated Ralph; 'I want everybody to love Birdie.'

'Ralph,' said the gipsy, with tender pathos, 'Birdie is all to me!'

Ralph grasped his hand, a thrill of joy pervading him.

'Ralph! how is it,' asked Somers, 'that men who say they love HIM can talk about HIM as they do? I could not talk about those I love except to very few—to none but you, Ralph.'

'I thought so till yesterday,' said Ralph, and then he related the incident at the railway.

'How could you have done it?' Somers asked in amazement.

'I do not know—it came upon me suddenly,' said Ralph; 'those chaps had such a jolly look, Harry. And then I did it in such a way as quite astonished myself.'

The Soldier-gipsy now went on. 'Ever!' cried he in fervent accents, 'for she is Love! I see a rescue—a death—not mine, I would it had been—for now they're toning down—'

'What?' exclaimed Ralph.

'The waves upon your hand; they point to Woman's fairy form.' Ralph trembled, the tall gipsy quietly continuing, 'Separation short—changing—changed. No more Speculation! Cured! two thousand years before you are fit for society—a dreamy interval! Now, erratical! Shortly, ecstatical! There are but stages three—' He paused.

'Coining a word for you, old fellow,—say *lunatical!*'

'I am glad to see you take it all so quietly, Ralph; you will want all your coolness before the morrow's "sun,"' said the tall gipsy, gazing intently on the other.

'I have a plenty when there's any need,' returned Ralph.

They were silent for some little time. Presently the gipsy resumed, 'Her influence leads to a higher heaven than any I know. I agree with Praed, who says,—

> "I think that friars and their hoods,
> Their doctrines and their maggots,
> Have lighted up too many feuds,
> And far too many faggots;
> I think, while zealots fast and frown,
> And fight for two or seven,
> That there are fifty roads to Town,
> And rather more to Heaven."

She is my only road—I seem to want no other!' pursued he rapturously.

Ralph gazed upon his friend in silence for some moments; then, embracing him, cried in impassioned, broken accents, 'What if She should lead us both to—' he stopped.

'To Herself?' demanded the gipsy fervently.

'No, no,' exclaimed Ralph impatiently. 'Oh! Mystery surrounds us!'

'Too much, perhaps!' sighed Harry; 'but, cut off as I now am from all I love on earth except my faithful followers, my thoughts dwell upon these subjects in a way impossible to describe, even to you, Ralph.'

As he said this, Ralph detected a quiver in his voice. He looked up at him. What had suddenly transformed the features of the outcast? thought Ralph, for they were transformed. They wore a death-like pallor as he exclaimed with terrible vehemence:

'Ah, indeed, 'tis all mysterious! all—all! Amid the chaos upon which I now look back from my isolated vantage-ground, I see but one ruling, governing principle which must outlast worlds, and bid defiance to and conquer every other. I need not name it to you, Ralph! Never, oh, never will I do violence to that nobility of soul which is all that is now left to me; and which—if anything is—must be a direct emanation from the Changeless—the All-Lovely—the All-Beautiful!'

'But, Harry,' said Ralph, who appeared excited beyond measure at what his friend had just told him, 'with this deep, this changeless principle,—does there not exist its opposite—immortal Hate? Don't start! the past is past with you; but with me 'tis all to come! And when at times I hold my burning brow, and look for help of some kind from above, it does not come! but there comes instead a hatred so fierce that I feel convulsed with agony and ecstasy combined!'

It was now the turn of the Soldier-gipsy to grasp his friend

by the hand. 'I often think,' said he solemnly, 'about what I have done—don't shudder, Ralph! The world calls me Murderer! I know it does,' said he with a majestic frown upon his striking features. 'Viewed in its meagre light, I am a Murderer! Do I look like one, Ralph—to you?' Ralph appeared incapable at the moment of looking at his friend, who calmly proceeded thus: 'They hang Murderers, Ralph; did it not ever occur to you that Spoilers ought to be hanged much more? You seem surprised; but believe me, I am serious. Spoilers ought to be hanged if Murderers should! That is my calm conviction, Ralph.'

Awe-stricken and spellbound, Ralph whispered tremblingly, 'Go on.' His friend proceeded with calm and unperturbed demeanour. 'How many death-bed scenes have their villanous arts, their demoniacal plots not darkened—hastened—caused? How many maniacs have not they, by their quiet, dark, *irresponsible schemes* of wholesale robbery, either turned loose upon Society, or else caused to be shut up for the remainder of their wretched lives? A man cuts another's throat. Say, he meditates it; he does no more. Another man in his quiet city office calmly and deliberately schemes and plots wholesale plunder and destruction in the most cruelly refined and enticing of methods, in order that he may riot in wealth, revel in luxury and dissipation, or *beautify the back slums of the city—in order to make a name for himself!*—out of the proceeds of Cunning, Deviltry, and Spoliation! Say he succeeds. What do you find? Does that same Society which hanged the other hang this one? No! but it fawns upon him! No!' exclaimed he, springing in one bound upon his feet, and raising his arm, which he pointed in the direction of the far-distant city of Undone, while he finished the sentence in slow measured tones of superlative contempt, '*but—it—accepts—this—one's—gifts!*'

The Soldier-gipsy stood with his arm upraised, in bold outlines, against the ever-darkening sky, for several seconds, during which time neither spoke a word. At length Somers said in somewhat softer accents, 'Would He not have rid the world of a villain—I mean a villain like that one?'

'But, Harry,' said his friend, 'you are immeasurably above such a reptile—'

'I glory in having rid the world of such an one, nevertheless,' replied the other.

Ralph rose and embraced him. 'He scourged the money-changers out of the temple, and no one else, I think,' said he; 'but, Harry, you wouldn't kill another Vampyre, would you now? that's the test!'

'I would kill him again ten times over if he came to life,' was the reply. 'What's that?' he suddenly exclaimed. A vessel was visible on the distant horizon, making towards them. Ralph trembled violently, while the Soldier-gipsy whispered in his ear, 'Be calm! She is safe!'

Chapter XXIII.

'They that touch pitch will be defiled.'—Shakespeare.

The Saints, *alias* the Sternites, *alias* the Chapel-goers, were enthusiastic upon the subject of 'Fleasaway.' It was true, Todigrab was no more, Fleasum no longer flourished, and the City was polluted with the sulphurous smoke and vapour eddying about those two Vortices, which was all that now remained to represent the former grandeur and wealth of two of its most famous Arch-Vampyres and Spoilers. But the Sternites were indefatigable, and the people were as gullible as usual. 'Tracts for the Soul' was the Saints' watchword, and 'Tracts of Soil' were, as a matter of course, nowhere.

A high-sounding prospectus was soon set circulating, huge vans too advertising the scheme were to be seen about the principal thoroughfares of Undone city, and all the chief cities and towns of the Old Countree. The prospectus ran thus:

EMIGRATION TO FLEASAWAY ON THE MOST CHRISTIAN AND RESPECTABLE PRINCIPLES COMPANY (LIMITED).

Capital £100,000,000, in shares of £1 each.

Directors.

Phœnix Makemunnie Enniow Fleasum (brother to the dear departed of that name. N.B. Lives hoping to rejoin him in a future and better world!).

Phœnix Nemo Catzpore Grab (brother to the late much-lamented Cervill Todi Grab. N.B. Lives as above—very much!).

Cheetly Thymecerving Catzpore (of the Great City Firm Catzpore and Fleasum).

Saint Peter Gallwood (an inimitable Groaner at Public Meetings when occasion requires), Undone Vortex.

Saint Luke Scraporl Meekface, *alias* Pointer (drawing 'cover' admirably well, and ditto, ditto, in every particular), Undone Vortex.

Saint Wary Obadiah Lankheart Mole, Vice-Chairman Undone Vortex (too well known to need description! Not to be confounded with Saint Weary-of-the-flesh, as the grasshopper is not a burden to him).

Tyro-Saint Jacob Cautilous Dapper, U.V. (N.B. Promises well!)

Tyro-Saint Fid-fad Lukewarm, Secretary U.V. (and recently become a charming young Vessel of Grace).

SAINT ZEBEDEE TABERNACLE, U.V., V.G., &c.
SAINT DIVES WIDAWAKE DIPLEAP, Chairman U.V., V.G., &c.
(With unlimited power to do any mortal thing they like with every farthing of the people's money they can lay their hands upon!)

Secretary: FULLFLEDGED SAINT HEVNFACING LANKWAES.
Brokers: SAINT LUKE SCRAPORL MEEKFACE & CO.; TYRO-SAINT JACOB CAUTILOUS DAPPER; SAINT WARY, not to be confounded, &c. (don't be too sure!), and every other Vortex Saint mentioned in this prospectus.
Bankers: PHŒNIX GRAB BROTHERS.
Solicitors: BATE, KATCH, LEV-I-ANDRI & CO.

Owing to a great want universally felt of a field for purely Evangelical Emigration, and one conducted at the same time on a highly 'respectable' footing, the Directors of the above undertaking have yielded to the earnest solicitations of a multitude of serious, soul-writhing applicants, and have consented to co-operate in a scheme which they are proud to feel cannot fail to prove a Success!

As nothing should be attempted without a view to that end, it is now proposed to ship off, free of cost, One Million Evangelical Labourers with their precious wives and families (the more infants in arms the better!) to the fertile, *alias* fatal, plains and valleys, the salubrious, *alias* lugubrious, mountain sides, and the virgin tracts of Fleasaway.

That eminent Evangelical authority, Mr. Smoothorl, computes that even were the intending Emigrants desirous of starvation, and sat down and did nothing, such a fate would be next to impossible, as grass abounds, (in places) a species of tea also luxuriates; and, on the whole, Nature smiles pleasantly! But, with the energy for which not only Old Countree Evangelical labourers, but also their precious wives and families, are proverbial, things, so computes Mr. S., *must* go on swimmingly!

It is also *proposed* to ship off large quantities of stores, such as beans, peas, oatmeal, rice, besides tins of sardines for Sundays —no 'bitter,' as everything in this Company is to be conducted on the sweetest Christian principles imaginable—sufficient to last out the first year or two, if not less! so that they could not starve absolutely even if they tried, which to a certainty they will not do. At the expiration of that period—if not before—they will be entirely off the hands of the Company; in other words—to use an expressive and pardonable word—on their own hook! By this time, too, Fleasaway will doubtless have proved the great desideratum, and therefore—a Success!

When the Evangelical labourers, wives and families, shall have felt themselves calmly settled on their land, or even if it

should so happen that there is no land for them to calmly settle upon, and they should feel naturally less calm in consequence, *Tracts* will be issued in great variety and abundance wherewith to occupy their wandering minds, should they wander, which is presumably possible.

Should any dissatisfaction arise amongst ill-regulated minds at the turn things might take in the event of Tracts of Soil not being forthcoming, Tracts for the Soul will be dealt out with increased rapidity, in order to counteract any results of such little occurrences. They will be thus on a kind of vantage ground, should any dire calamity arise. To meet this probability a regular service has been arranged, by which all the most exaltedly sensational and modern style of Tracts will be shipped off every fortnight—this, too, free of cost. By this liberal arrangement the Directors hope to be able, not only to tranquillise unruly spirits, but to allay their own qualms of Conscience—feeling assured that in the monetary, as in the Spiritual, world the happy moment is dawning when Her claims can no longer be ignored.

Having made ample provision, as far as this view is concerned, for the requirements of both worlds, and feeling much relieved in consequence, it only remains to treat of

Minor Arrangements—to wit: Railways—extensive—all in prospect ! Banks—to be started at once, in order to facilitate the transmission of funds wherewith to enable benighted souls to retrace their weary steps homeward, should they have sufficient strength and energy left to make the attempt, and should Death not have succeeded in removing them from the scenes of their peaceful, because inane, labours. Memo.: Exchange, ten per cent, profitable because risky. Productions.—A book might be written under this head, or mightn't, according to fancy and as the case might be. Then there is the delightful Myrabolane of the jungle, which may be sucked, with up-turned eyes, *in extremis*. What more delightful spectacle—what soul-enthralling ecstasy ! Picture an Evangelical labourer—the very name is music !—with his Evangelical wife and Evangelical family, all in a *wandering state* about him, sucking the Myrabolane of the Fleasaway jungle ! But not to pause for contemplation. Tobacco, too, of a certain hybrid growth abounds, which stimulating thirst has the grateful tea-plant growing by its side. What exhilarating tableau !

If—in his wanderings—the Evangelical labourer, his wife and family, should unwittingly mistake hybrid tobacco for sound wholesome grass, and in their enervated and semi-conscious state partake largely of the same, what opportunity would not thus be

afforded for the ready exercise of Christian charity? True, Evangelical stomach-pumps will be a scarce commodity in the Fleasaway jungle. The more room therefore for the prompt display of noble qualities. And here 'tis needless to expatiate, for mother-wit will doubtless contrive to settle matters somehow.

We then most confidently and pathetically recommend Fleasaway to the Enterprising, the Intrepid, the Infatuated Evangelical youth of our native land.

Thither, if fond of an exchange shot with half-breeds, posted securely behind a tree or rock while he stands manfully in the open, let him hie! By all means let such an one shoulder his Evangelical rifle, ram down his Saintly ball and powder with Tractarian or Scriptural wadding, and be off at once to help defend his weaker brethren in the Lord! What object more worthy—what experience so in- and de-structive? And should the already highest-in-the-world murder-rate be much increased thereby, what, indeed, will it matter, so that all be gathered in the fold at the last, and the Saints who continue their Earthly sojourn be replenished and greatly edified thereby? To such an eager, longing, ardent, thirsty soul we say unhesitatingly, and from the bottoms of such remants of hearts as we have left:

'Know'st thou the land where the pale citrons blow,
(The Spectre soliloquised, "Or don't!")
And golden fruits through dark green foliage glow?
("Or might!")
Oh, soft the breeze that breathes from that blue sky!
("All my eye!")
Still stand the myrtles and the laurels high.
("Unexceptionably still!")
Know'st thou it well? Oh, thither, Friend,
("Be calm!")
Thither with thee, Beloved, would I wend.'
("I wouldn't!")

It may be thought rather paradoxical by some, in view of the never-to-be-forgotten Backaway Blood-trafficking Swindle, that this rather novel kind of prospectus should have insured success. Yet, considering the proverbial gullibility of the mass of the inhabitants of the Old Countree, it really affords no grounds whatever for surprise.

Alick Goodheart told Ralph they might just as well have started, bulled and beared BOGIES! All present laughed at this.

'Except,' urged Ralph, 'that Bogies, so far as I can see, would be innocent of direct traffic in blood, which Fleasaway is not meant to be.'

A detective officer now entered, followed by two quiet, serious-looking gentlemen. He proceeded to inform Goodheart that he had succeeded in securing three out of his five runaway clerks, who had been conspiring during the course of several 'accounts' to rob him.

'How was it done?' asked Markham, strolling in.

'By doubling the amounts each client had open,' replied Goodheart. 'If the clients won, they won too; but if they lost, I lost; they having filled in blank cheques to pay the jobbers' "differences."'

'And you led them on to it,' said Markham gravely. 'Your clerks saw little else but Peculation going on around them, yourself being the instrument! I hope you'll prosecute the jobbers as well as the clerks.'

'Prosecute a jobber?' laughed Goodheart: 'as well try to prosecute the wind! The Committee though are taking it up in earnest. You see,' added he with a knowing smile, '*it might happen to themselves!* ha-ha-ha!'

'Oh, Ralph, my good fellow,' said Markham, with horror and dread depicted in every feature, '*don't take your case before the Committee!* Goodheart tells me he is prepared to prove that Cautilous has grossly swindled you.'

'I've given it to Bold and Bold within the present hour,' said Ralph. 'Young Bold is at it now; but I must be off,' said he; and Sir Manfred's brougham took him direct to the Westernport station, where he met with the adventures narrated in the foregoing chapter.

'How Ralph can go about as he does with that poor girl upon the seas is a mystery to me,' said Markham.

'Not at all, not at all, my friend,' replied Goodheart. 'He knows she's safe.'

'Hullo! I congratulate you, Goodheart!' exclaimed a voice I at once recognised as Fullheart's. 'So you've resigned! nothing like being first, and only just in time to save being expelled, ha, ha!'

'Allow me also to congratulate you most warmly,' said Charles Markham. 'Oh, this is good news!'

'And a score more are preparing to follow you,' said the old man.

'None too soon,' said Goodheart. 'Secrecy I abominate, and closed doors! Trained to it from my youth, I never till lately gave it a moment's consideration; but,' said he, with heightened colour, 'I would sooner bring up my family on a crust than belong to an Institution which, constituted as it now

is, fattens on the Miseries and the Ruin of the Weak and Despoiled!'

'Spoken like a man!' exclaimed his old friend, warmly embracing him; 'and mark my words, the end is not far off!'

Just then Japhet Numscul, a former client of Goodheart's, walked into his office. He had been introduced to him by Cheetly Thymecerving Catzpore, had got into his debt over a Speculative account, and now refused to pay his 'differences.' After informing Goodheart that he intended to dispute his right to carry over his account without written instructions from him to do so, he dared him to do his worst. Goodheart at once declined to have another word with Japhet, who left the office with an injured air.

'This man owes me a thousand pounds which I have paid the jobbers; and because the markets all went the wrong way he thinks to leave me in the lurch,' said Goodheart. 'Believing him to be a gentleman I required no "cover," and now he raises a point which in a Law Court would in all probability be decided against me, so much do Juries and the Bench fight against Speculation on the Vortex. Yet he owes me the money. Ah, I am sick of it all! Had the account gone the other way, he would have claimed his "differences" fast enough. These are some of the evil results!'

'Mark my words, the end is not far off!' reiterated his old friend.

'So Friar's "hammered,"' exclaimed Markham. 'Members made him pay or deliver, I hear.'

'What's it all about?' inquired Fullheart, who, having been absent from town, had not heard the news.

'Only some *fracas*,' replied Markham, 'in consequence of Mukfellin's *exposé*—fellows came down on him like a shot—money wanted—several thous—and game's up!'

'Mukfellin will follow, they say,' observed Goodheart. 'Why, he put Friar on his legs!'

'And was off his own only a few months ago!'

'These jack-in-the-box men are a source of wonderment to my simple mind,' pursued Goodheart.

'I am far from being an apologist of Friar's,' remarked Fullheart; 'but surely a little consideration might have been extended to one of their own number by members of an Institution whose fundamental bond is SECRECY!'

'You refer to the *et tu quoque* argument, probably?' rejoined Goodheart.

'That view has its weight, though not in this case,' observed Fullheart. 'A sense, however, of delicacy—'

'Delicacy!' laughed Goodheart; 'my good fellow, *sauve qui peut* on the Vortex!'

'I know, I know,' warmly replied the old man; 'but Friar fell by reason of "outside" attacks. Other members were bound to see him through existing arrangements, though not to enter into fresh obligations. *Coûte qui coûte*, he should have been let down easy. It was not a panic-time, and there was therefore no excuse for such conduct.'

Chapter XXIV.

'Ye gods, annihilate but space and time,
And make two lovers happy.'—Pope.

It lay upon my Spectral chamber table,
Smaller than many a watch, and moved
By fickle atmospheres. Its fragile indicator
Pointed ever downwards. The night was of the thickest.
Would to the God of Heaven it had cleared!
But direful tempest fell. Heaven's thunder
Was abroad. And Geraldine——!

* * * * * * *

As I was watching Ralph Osborne and Haini strolling up and down the beach in front of Grimmouth cave, Hugh Nairn came up and said to Ralph in a nervous, hurried kind of way, 'Now, sir, Trebraith says there's not a moment to be lost.'

Retiring immediately he had uttered these words, Ralph said passionately, 'Haini, do let me go—it's quite right, I know.'

'Dear Ralph, be guided by me,' said the true-hearted girl, 'these men will do much better without you; and consider, too sudden a shock to her might—' The remainder of the sentence died away upon her lips.

'Trebraith says the tide is very uncertain to-night, sir,' again interposed Hugh, advancing impatiently towards them.

'I shall not go,' said Ralph quietly, turning towards Hugh. 'I'll come and give you a hand at launching that pinnace though,' he continued, with a look of tremulous anxiety.

'And I too!' said Haini.

'No, you go under shelter, dear Haini,' said the boy; 'see how it pours!'

'The Fernland native requires no shelter!' exclaimed Haini, with flashing eyes. She put her arm around his neck and wept; they were both silent.

The sea was now running high, and a thick mist was scudding over it, looking black and grim. Wild birds screeched around, darting into the cave and startling the seals. They took no notice of me, however, and I did not want them to.

All seemed ready, down to Billy's sharpening the great sheath-knife he wore. This man was now devoted to the cause of 'the prittie flooer;' his heart was no longer honeycombed, but was fast growing up into healthy flesh and blood. The Soldier-gipsy looked calm and resolute, his stalwart followers quiet and determined. The B.D.V. was busy. Though 'Backaway' had not prospered him, something had been agreeing with him. He looked as little like a Murderer as Somers. I overheard him mutter, 'Ah, trying it on with "Fleasaway," eh? they sha'n't!' For a moment his eye gleamed fiercely; in the next he was loading pistols with steady earnestness. The mouth of the cave was darkened with a large thick screen, to keep the light from being seen at sea.

'Can Lord Alfred's steamer stand this wind, Trebraith?' I heard Hugh ask.

'Er dras tu much woater, er du,' said Billy.

'You're sure this is the night?'

'Iss—iss, et es,' replied Billy emphatically.

'The Retribution will never come on such a night?' said Hugh incredulously.

'Jack Spriggles ses the Voiper wull,' returned the other.

I flitted out and saw a dark-looking object approaching the shore. Lights were hung about the rigging. The Viper's Captain was drunk, and was singing with wild and frightful energy snatches of sea-songs, mingled with blasphemous oaths, the refrain to each being, 'We'll a—a—all g—gdown 'gthr, boys!' which heroic sentiment did not meet with that hearty approval of the majority of the cut-throats which he had invited.

On my return Jack Spriggles, who had just arrived, was exciting much interest among the gipsies. He had combed out his grizzly locks, and turned his enormous moustache back over his ears till, entwining with his hair, it escaped through a rent in his sailor's hat, looking like a bundle of cock's feathers in damp mourning. Amid general approval he said gaily, 'Us'll mak it warm wuk for some on 'em, I knows.' And he looked prepared to do his share.

Amid the wild roar of the elements I heard Ralph trying to address the men. 'My dear friends, I grieve I cannot accompany you—'

A burst of thunder drowned his voice. The Viper, now

quite close, showed clearly, as vivid flashes of lightning revealed her to their eager gaze, and showed the glory of the scene. The sparkling waters foamed around her, while the bursting of the tumultuous billows, as they ground the defiant rocks, echoed amongst the frowning cliffs, drowning his voice completely. He began again, the now continuous flashes imparting a heavenly lustre to his excited features. There was a perfect blaze of light. As he gazed upon the scene it served to increase the raging tumults of his soul.

''Tis not without a sigh I say Farewell! My tears—my prayers go with you! You are going, I know, to retrieve the honour of my own flesh and blood! Help! help!' he cried to Heaven; 'my men, strike home!—spare not. I vow a deadly vengeance against this crawling reptile. Earn this, my soul's most fervent gratitude, and She—and you—and I—are one—for evermore!'

He shook hands with one and all, saying, 'Strike home!' to each, and sank upon the rocks, the noble half-caste girl whispering sweet words of comfort in his ear. Swift moments flew. They walked along, and as they moved unevenly together upon a carpet of seaweed and white foam several inches deep, her form and his now touching, and then an inch or two apart, only to meet again, I saw the rich colour mantling in her cheeks, as the lightning flashed again, and a soft, bewitching tremor playing around those lustrous eyes. He pictured her as once they were alone together on Middletown's broad quay. Ah, then how distant she was! And when he thought of all her wonderful devotion, he asked, 'Who am I that she should thus surround me with her love—now, now, too? pure, noble-hearted girl! And how she loves dear Birdie for my sake! I despise myself!'

'Ralph! get behind that reef—you there—I here. I fear dear Maude can never come in time. Oh, what a beauty!' exclaimed Haini, as Ralph handed her a dagger.

'Two beauties in one!' replied the boy as she concealed it in her bosom.

Chapter XXV.

'Tis you that say it, not I. You do the deeds,
And your ungodly deeds find me the words.'
SOPHOCLES (MILTON'S *Translation*).

I CONFESS to a fondness for the old city of Undone. In all my wanderings throughout Space all sights had fallen far short of its bewildering absorbing grandeur. It had a peculiar fascination for me. Had I not been a calm, though not unmoved, spectator of dark and heart-rending scenes within its time-honoured old walls—dim presages perhaps of more momentous events shortly to follow in their train? Still, what harm had it done to me personally? True, I never shall forget that sob; but then those sweetest of pretty lips might not always be sorrowful ones. As I had found its Society so I had taken its Society, and although I will not say too much as to the virtue of all its citizens—for I never flatter—I nevertheless felt unaccountably drawn to it at times. Besides, I had received orders, and they must be obeyed.

Memory carries me back with fatal accuracy to one night. As I looked around the precincts of a spot which has long since become historic, and which had then engulfed all the hopes of the great Monetary and Financial Firm of Grab Brothers, in Money-street, thoughts of a most engrossing character occupied my mind. How could it have been, I asked myself, that simultaneously with the tragic termination of his career in the Ghost's Walk of the Ancient Court of Old Trememdon Castle that December morning, the Arch-Spoiler's Vortex should have sprung up and the Banking-house of Grab Brothers have disappeared? The flames were now roaring and flaunting in the faces of the terrified bystanders. I therefore determined to descend at once and discover the cause of this unusual phenomenon.

I had wandered about for some time, when all at once I caught sight of a man reclining upon a huge baulk of sulphur in a cavern connecting the two Arch-Spoilers' Vortices. He seemed perturbed and depressed in mind. As he calmly surveyed the dimly-lighted scene, coughing at intervals as the sulphurous smoke oppressed him, and then drinking slowly from an earthen goblet, which he filled occasionally from a cauldron of boiling pitch at his side, thus hoping to clear his

throat, I scarcely recognised in that shrunken form the then late City Editor of *The Age*—the leading journal of the world; yet 'twas he, the co-defendant, with Todigrab, in a remarkable and celebrated action for libel.

While waiting in the hope that the two might meet, I observed, by the aid of the sickly glare of a torch he held in his hand, Hurkuleze—for that was his name—became even paler than was his wont, as, feeling for his note-book, he emptied each pocket of his waistcoat—in vain.

Now the City Editor's whole charm lay in his waistcoat. It was not a sealskin waistcoat, neither was it cloth. What was it? Had it a colour? Well, it might have had a shade of brown in it, but more of golden yellow. Was it close fitting? It might have close fitted—a giant. It did not close fit Hurkuleze, although it closely buttoned up to his closely shaven chin. Competence, Respectability, and Property—somewhere—lurked beneath that waistcoat. It was a garment which hid a multitude of—Shares in 'Transactions'—Shares in 'Bubble Companies'—Shares in, oh—who knows?—Shares in Light?—Shares in—DARKNESS!—Shares in 'Tips'—Shares in—Smiles (naughty ones)—Shares in Frowns (horrid ones)—Shares in yells—'EXECRATIONS!'—in—in—in—let Hurkuleze speak for himself.

And then he put his note-book into his pocket safely—for it had tumbled out in his inadvertency on to the cold damp earth—into that gold, yellow-brown waistcoat-pocket, and he held his hand tightly against that waistcoat, which ensconced—ah, who shall tell?— !!

* * * * *

'But, Todi, how long I have waited for you down here—day after day—night after night, and you would not come!' reproached Hurkuleze. But Todigrab answered not. He had seated himself alongside his old companion upon the log of brimstone during my absence, for I had tired of waiting, and had been examining the subterranean passage minutely. 'Where have you been?' demanded Hurkuleze testily. But the other answered him never a word. 'Well, "here we are again!" as old friends say,' exclaimed the City Editor, with some degree of satisfaction depicted on his dejected features. 'I kept away while the trial was going on, and have already commenced to bore a tunnel Northwards to save the Nor'-west pass—'

'Save be damned!' interrupted the other sharply; 'that won't pay. Come now, confess it, you owe your present position to me. I made you.'

'Made me? Position?—Damnation I call it. I wish I were out of it,' cried the disgusted City Editor.

'Tut, tut, tut, we shall get out. You don't know those precious fools as I do. They'll soon forget all about it; but how did you get in?' demanded his companion.

'Tell me about the Action first,' urged Hurkuleze restlessly.

'What Action?' coolly dissimulated Todigrab.

'THE Action!—Who lost?' asked the City Editor fiercely.

'What, the Bobberie Action?' inquired Todigrab leisurely.

'Of course. Poor Sangwynne!' replied Hurkuleze in lacrymable accents, 'one child out of the many of Sportive Fortune!'

'You jolly old fool, what's the matter with you?' asked the other gaily.

'He left his native land at an early age,' drivelled on the City Editor, 'travelling through many Far Countrees in search of peace of mind—domestic happiness fretted—the equable, the deep, the enduring love of woman denied him—like many others, falling into scrapes—thoughtless—not dishonourable—his connection with the most barefaced of swindles being as guileless as his simplicity was unquestionable—'

'Hush, man, hush!' angrily remonstrated Todigrab.

'Well, tell me about the Action, then,' whined Hurkuleze.

'Your Action, you mean; oh—'

'No, yours—'

'No, but yours—'

'Yours—it was yours!'

'What cheek!' whimpered Todigrab. 'I like that too. Well, of course, you lost. Did *I* ever lose anything? Tell me that,' demanded the Arch-Spoiler, now smiling pleasantly as he twitched his brow.

'It all depends upon what you mean by "anything,"' replied Hurkuleze drily. 'Men do say you never had—*one thing*—to lose! hia-ha!'

'*The Age* has thrown you over! hia-hia-ha!' screamed Todigrab.

'I threw *The Age* over first. What do folks say to my letters?'

'Bother letters! you shouldn't write,' cried Todigrab surlily.

'You told me to—'

'Don't write any more, then. Well, if you must know,' continued Todigrab with a sardonic twist of his features, '"men do say" that you were one of the biggest robbers about, with greater opportunities than any other big robbers—'

'Than yours?' interrupted the former City Editor tauntingly.

'Hear me out,' growled the other. 'That as they lacked your opportunities, you succeeded in trapping the countless multitude, but seldom the other big robbers—'

'Leave them alone for that,' sighed Hurkuleze.

'That the countless multitude,' continued the other, 'are now undergoing untold sufferings, unheard-of privations—'

'Go on! don't spare me—anything else?' asked the City Editor.

'Something about—aching hearts—and that distressing consciousness arising out of, or else the forerunner of—depths of despair, which, taking possession of, and weighing down the dupes who implicitly trusted to the honour, or, at any rate, never suspected the collusion of the City Editor of the first journal in the world—'

'Yes—ah—what?' writhed the City Editor.

'Their wretchedness and misery became at length too great to be borne, and terminated in beds of FEVER—DELIRIUM—DEATH!—all of which lie at your door!'

'And not at yours?' demanded the City Editor, turning, and placing a withered hand upon the Arch-Spoiler's arm.

'They do not mention me, except in the matter of—er—some cheques—er—don't laugh, Hurkuleze,' said Todigrab angrily, as the City Editor attempted a faint chuckle, 'they lost you the Action!'

'Me!' shrieked the other, 'I'm a Public Benefactor! I'm a—a—'

He stopped, while the other added calmly, 'You don't believe it, come now.'

'Why, yes, I attacked those Great Countree "Rings"—their "judicial corruption" too—'

'Won't they laugh now?' chuckled Todigrab aside.

'Really I'm The Public Castigator—'

'When it paid to castigate!' grinned the Arch-Spoiler.

'Just so,' replied the other, drawing breath; 'we're all in the same boat.'

'Don't say "we,"' said Todigrab sharply; 'I got off scot-free.'

'Did you really, though?' asked Hurkuleze, eyeing him keenly. 'What cheques did you refer to just now?' suddenly gasped the City Editor. 'Not—some—you—gave—ME?'

'The same!' coolly rejoined the other; 'hia-hia-hia-hia-ha!'

* * * * *

Chapter XXVI.

'Tell me, friends,
Am I not sung and proverb'd for a fool
In every street? Do they not say, "How well
Are come upon him his deserts"? Yet why?
Immeasurable strength they might behold
In me, of wisdom nothing more than mean:
This with the other should, at least, have pair'd:
These two, proportion'd ill, drove me transverse.'

Samson Agonistes.

'Why so taciturn, friend Hurkuleze?' demanded Todigrab, observing the effect of his disclosure upon the City Editor; 'and why that bloodless lip?' asked he tauntingly.

'It isn't bloodless, is it?' trembled forth the City Editor, who then moaned, 'I'm a man of few words, you know,' and relapsed into silence.

'I told them they were on account of—"disbursements,"' urged the other; but this information not producing any perceptible effect, Todigrab mixed him a goblet of pitch by adding a full-sized sulphur ball, saying, 'That will put you all right; it always does me.'

But the ex-Editor declined, shaking his head solemnly and muttering, 'This is beyond pitch!'

'And brimstone too?' asked Todigrab, inclining his head.

No response being forthcoming but a solitary 'Ugh!' Todigrab gave a long low whistle characteristic of men of his stamp.

A key was heard to turn in a rusty lock, a door to creak on its grating hinges, and two forms, hand in hand, emerged from the direction of Aurum Factors, Dooum Easy-lane, in the city of Undone. One, a total stranger to me, was dressed in the height of fashion, and monstrously bedecked with gold and jewels. As he sauntered in with a jaunty air which sat well upon him, I perceived by the uncertain light of their waving torches the words, 'For this world only,' emblazoned in gilded letters upon his brow, and that he was quite blind.

The stifling atmosphere of those regions had certainly not agreed with the companion who led him, whom I at length recognised as the once-burly John Fleasum. Ah, thought I, then these must be all Vampyres, who never die, for had I not been given distinctly to understand that two at least of their number had met the fates they so richly merited at the hands of their Dupes some time previously?

'Wurldlie Mammon,' Todigrab now blandly said, 'allow

me to introduce to you my dear friend Hurkuleze—Hurkuleze, my—my much esteemed and dearly-cherished "pal," Wurldlie Mammon.'

But Hurkuleze took no notice whatever of either.

'Ha, Hurkuleze—not know me?' cried the once-burly John, attempting a faint 'tol-de-lido,' which completely broke down, and finishing with 'For he's a "Millionaire"!' to the old tune.

'Millionaire?—who—where?' demanded Mammon, falling into Todigrab's arms in his eager attempt to embrace Hurkuleze.

When the Arch-Spoiler had finished kissing Mammon's forehead—and he seemed never tired of that—Hurkuleze roused himself sufficiently to ask Fleasum what the inhabitants of the city of Undone, and of the Old Countree generally, said regarding the trial.

'They hope you will think of them in your "retreat," for you are followed by their bitter curses,' replied Fleasum; 'and they hope it will all come upon you now—'

'I stuck up for you,' interrupted Todigrab; 'Man in your Position—nothing unusual, &c. &c.'

'But did they believe him?' asked Hurkuleze excitedly.

'Devil a one,' chuckled John.

'Didn't *The Age* stick up for me?' groaned Hurkuleze.

'Oh, no! the conductors expressed their "profound and unalloyed mortification" that they should, after having "reposed unbounded trust" in you, have been "betrayed"! And the people all say, that none too soon was the change made. That the conductors were bound to be as scrupulously jealous of your honour and integrity as of their own individual reputations. That no penitence of *theirs* can ever atone for the deplorable mischiefs you have, during a long period of years, caused to be inflicted by your support given to rotten schemes. And that they should have placed it beyond your power to be swayed by —*Auri sacra fames.*'

'But supposing I kept all this knowledge from the conductors?'

'Granted the possibility—and they must have been more than ordinarily dull and stupid conductors were it so—the people say—mind, *I'm not speaking of the journals*,' added John, with a significant glance at Hurkuleze—'the conductors would be equally reprehensible; even as in matters of everyday life the parallel holds good—*Ignorantia legis neminem excusat.*'

'That's all very well,' joined in Wurldlie Mammon; 'but look at the other side. Admit for argument's sake, which I do

not admit, that Hurkuleze has been as corrupt as his greatest enemies proclaim, yet, considering the multifarious and complex nature of a great journalist's occupations, one should hesitate before affixing any deeper stigma than that of very gross negligence to the conductors of *The Age*, under all the circumstances of the case. What say you, Todigrab?'

'*The Age* and I have fallen out. We do not "speak." Therefore, I decline to give any opinion,' responded the Arch-Spoiler.

'What admirable *finesse!*' cried a voice above them. All started.

When calm had been in some measure restored, Todigrab remarked that no *finesse* ever excelled that practised over the 'Backaway loan.'

'Hush!' shouted Fleasum, ''twas a Backaway cut-throat sent me here! Human flesh-and-blood nightmares still haunt me!'

'And me too!' joined in Hurkuleze.

'Let's have the *finesse*, nevertheless,' urged Mammon eagerly.

''Twas nothing unusual,' said Todigrab coolly; 'I got my dear friend Hurkuleze here to raise objections to the introduction of the second loan "so soon after the first—"'

'Yes, yes,' drivelled Hurkuleze, 'to be sure—yes—ye—y—'

'Wait a moment, my boy,' sharply interposed Todigrab, '*in one issue.*' He then looked calmly round upon his eager inquiring companions, and continued, '—to be followed in the next day's City Article—by the removal of every objection—the smoothing away of every obstacle—and, of course, "Backaway" TOOK! hia-ha!'

'Who did the DIRTY WORK?' now demanded the voice from on high, in tones both loud and clear. 'Who, I ask,' continued the same voice in thrilling, startling accents, which rang again throughout the gloomy cavern's vast recesses, 'so influential—so looked up to—*so trusted*—PILOTED a confiding, an unsuspecting, a hard-working Public—TO DESTRUCTION?'

It ceased. Amid the solemn silence which followed, I caught the sounds of suppressed sobbing at my side, which culminated at length in a burst of passionate feeling:

'I did it—for the sake of—HIS GIFTS!'

* * * * *

'But, surely, my second letter had some effect on the inhabitants of Undone city—the Public, whom I have—*served so well!*' whined Hurkuleze, after a pause.

'It had some effect, certainly,' replied Fleasum dubiously.

'John Bull is one of the easiest fellows going, but, nevertheless, an ugly customer when once fairly roused. In HIS estimation you brought suspicion upon *The Age,* besides irrevocably destroying your at all times doubtful reputation by keeping down here out of the way when so much was at stake!'

'But *I have been acting in accordance with the wishes and suggestions of its conductors!*' urged Hurkuleze plaintively.

'Listen! what say they?—Hurkuleze "*had the opportunity, of which he did not avail himself, of subsequently attending and giving his own explanations of the transactions between him and the co-defendant.*"—Why did you not appear in person?'

'ME appear in the witness-box? Oh, John! that chap' (pointing upwards in the direction of the City Law Courts) 'would soon have got it all out of me! Ha, John—it does come upon me now—all—all!'

They listened. Amid solemn strains of music, a voice chanted forth:

'I will show mercy!' But Hurkuleze broke in vehemently ere the reverberations had ceased:

'Shattered Hopes—Ruined Constitutions—Broken Hearts—to them; but to me—ETERNAL TORMENT!'

* * * * *

How I escaped I know not. The scene is quite beyond me to describe. I recollect the cavern reeling throughout, while an avalanche of solid earth blocked up the way in every direction. Escape, even to a Spectre, seemed impossible. By the fickle, sulphurous light which every now and again revealed the countenances of these men—for in the confusion their torches had gone out—I gazed upon them as one after another reappeared to view. Hurkuleze was praying for instant annihilation—but no—these men could not perish!

'My conductors,' he gasped, 'were surely aware of practices which had been the topics of common conversation in City circles for years and years!—oh, this crushing load!'

Fleasum staggered, but, shaking himself, soon rallied. With a long-drawn sigh, he observed, 'Your SILENCE is your VERDICT!! —*The Age*—in view of Eternity, and the Universe generally—must be "above suspicion"!!'

Wurldlie Mammon's forehead, which glistened in the fitful light, was only just apparent above the *débris;* while Todigrab, save that a slightly satisfied expression had stolen over his features, changed not.

Chapter XXVII.

'Abashed the devil stood,
And felt how awful goodness is, and saw
Virtue in her shape—how lovely!'—Milton.

Lord Alfred had purchased a 'plaything'—the Retribution. She mounted four very powerful guns. She was built on a somewhat novel principle. Instead of being heavily iron-plated abeam, she had but slight armour there. Her stem and stern were heavily plated. She was furnished with an apparatus which consisted of a series of light but very strong iron fans, which shot from her side at pleasure, like coiling shutters, and when extended by means of stout iron supports, acting in concert with them, steadied her very considerably. No wonder that her first shot, which was fired at a preconcerted signal from the shore, hulled the Viper. All was now excitement. I flitted in haste towards the boat; missing it in the dense mist, for the storm had now lulled, I found myself alongside a light female figure descending the cliff. Raising a little white, well-rounded arm, she exclaimed,

'I'm practised now. I'll shoot—I'll stick—I'll run them—'

Ah, that was little Maude. How the plot thickens! thought I. She had caught sight of the Viper and the Retribution, then. I saw her clutch her pistol as she said aloud,

'Oh, won't I though—give me the chance.'

She was not now excited at the thought of the heavy balance lying at her banker's, not a penny of which had she touched.

Making once more for my Spectral chamber I observed the fragile indicator; it had ceased to lower. Not daring to tarry, I flung myself across the water. The Viper was heaving amongst the surging waves; but where were Ralph and Haini? I had not noticed them under the reef. Surely I was not becoming dazed, for I was no Gambler! I danced about in agony, flitting everywhere. Why, all seemed changed! The rocks seemed topsy-turvy; my limbs began to tremble. Oh, it was horrible! I darted along, fearful lest I might strike against the moon. I thought I smelt the sulphur from Undone city, too. I was like one daft, and at a crisis. 'I'll shake it off!' I cried in Spectral despair. 'Why did I go inside that horrid cave again? Perhaps there's something fearful boding, and I sha'n't see it. I've lost my children! Oh, Sun! oh, Stars! oh, Everything! have you

seen—? I'll flit on board the Viper—where is the Viper? Hullo! what's this? Ah, me! why there is Ralph inside the pinnace!' I listened. A long-drawn sigh escaped from such a lovely bosom! This reassured me, it looked like life—'twas Haini's.

'He would come, darling Maude,' she said. 'Just at the last he said, "I've got no reason left!" Oh, Maude! it made me shudder so to hear him talk; and then he said, "I never, never should forgive if—if—oh, Haini dear! I love her so! I hate my brother, and I'm going straight to murder him!" I knew not what to say, sweet Maude; we all would murder him!' and then she sighed a little sigh, and looked so wicked all at once, it did me good.

'No lack of life in the pinnace,' I thought.

'We'll all have a great fight,' said Maude, placing her little arms around her sister.

'Oh, yes, we'll die so hard! Let's speak to Ralph—he looks ill!'

'Hush! there's a dear,' said Ralph. 'There go the Retty's guns. Ah, look—the Viper's hulled! see how they are running—hurrah!'

Now Ralph Osborne was as religious as most men—more than many. Whether his training was judicious or otherwise it is not for the Spectre to determine; but certain it is, that although he *had* been brought up 'in the fear of the Lord,' he had at the same time been encouraged to think for himself, and learned, since becoming a man, to call in question much of what had been taught during youth. As he sat in the boat, harbouring deep feelings of vengeance against his brother, thoughts of a momentous character crowded in upon his excited brain. Pressing his hands upon his burning brow, 'Could it be,' thought he, 'that the Supreme Power is, or ever was, actuated by motives which enshroud His government with a halo at once uninviting and undignified?' And then he thought of what he was about to do: was it right or wrong? And I could tell nothing; it was not allowed. Bending his head low, resting it upon his trembling hands, immersed in intensest thought, he suddenly whispered, 'My God! who said those things?'

A sound—'Thou shalt do no murder'—seemed borne upon the winds of Heaven.

He whispered, 'Where was that?—it hovered!—it—it's ringing in the air!'

'What must I do?' I heard him ask in faltering accents.

They all regarded him in silence. Again he seemed to hear that voice.

'Thou— Ah, stop!' he cried, placing his hands to both his ears. Haini now addressed him; but the moment he removed his hands he seemed to hear the voice again.

'*I* will do none!' he said excitedly, and then he seemed to hear no more.

Just then a vivid flash revealed to him the gaze of the beauteous half-caste girl fixed intently on his anxious features. He thought of the distant past—the times when they used to accompany each other in their Fernland adventures—in the canoe, up the river's bank, through wild mountain passes, she cheering his solitude, and now, he knew, loving him to distraction all the while. Then he recounted all that had happened since—her strange, undying devotion, even now!

Harry Somers was sitting moodily in the boat, with his head buried deep in the hood of his cloak, quietly reserving himself for his share in the butchering which he felt assured was close at hand. His mind was evidently made up.

Ralph was even now vainly endeavouring to argue the matter out, every now and then a cold shudder coming over him as he did so.

Suddenly he groaned fiercely between his teeth,

'To do—or die!'

Haini heard him.

'To do, e'en while *I* die, dear Ralph!'

Her utterance and manner were tragic. Reclining now against Ralph's bosom, she murmured forth,

'Beloved Ralph!'

He pressed her close to him, Maude looking on in wondering silence.

She sees a bright flash from the vessel close beside them, followed by a sharp report. Ralph turns his face wildly up—the young girl in his arms gives a short, piercing scream—a wild, convulsive movement follows—her upraised arms fall convulsively on either side of him—and he embraced a dying girl—the true, the fated Haini!

The moment was terrible! Fierce demons hovered in the air, and seemed to mock him! Repentance and Remorse both seized him, but all too late!

'She has saved my wretched life!' he cried in bitterest accents. A fit of cold shivering came upon him. Imploring her to speak, he raised her face to his, but only to see death plainly written there! He cried to Heaven in agony, and then he sobbed,

'Oh, send her back to me!'

Placing her gently in the boat, while Maude was weeping over

her, he stood upright, with fiery passion coursing through his veins.

'Eternal hell!' he cried in fiercest tones.

'Lie down, sir! they'll hit you—'

'Let them; who the devil cares!' I heard him say.

The Viper's crew were all at work stopping the holes in her side, the Retribution having hit her between wind and water. A rope was thrown on board the pinnace, and before they had time to prevent it, a dozen resolute fellows were clambering up the chains, and standing on her deck.

'Cut the —— down!' roared the Captain. Somers ran him through, and he fell a corpse. This appeared to be the signal for a general fight.

'Obey me now,' shouted Harry to the others.

By the time the large holes in the vessel's side were plugged, the whole of the landsmen were on board.

'Stay you here, Maude darling, until I give the word. God preserve you!' I heard Ralph say.

Chapter XXVIII.

'Forgiveness to the injured does belong,
But they ne'er pardon who have done the wrong.'—Dryden.

The Viper pitched and rolled; the deck was soon bestrewed with dead, dying, and wounded. Perceiving they had been betrayed, the crew now fought with desperate valour; no quarter was given on either side. The hanging lanterns gave a wretched flame. In the uncertain light it was hard to distinguish friend from foe. Walter's men were good and steady swordsmen, bullies and desperate bravoes from every Countree. Their grizzly beards and moustaches mingled with their matted hair; and when they gave vent to a yell, which diverted the attention of their less wary antagonists, and put them off their guard, three or four would turn suddenly upon one in the *mélée* and be on guard the next moment. This one despatched, they placed him in front as a barrier, awaiting a fresh opportunity to do the like again. The Soldier-Hercules, however, had already sent four of these desperadoes to their last account, and the terror of his steady prowess soon began to work as a charm. The gipsies, too, used their own dialect, which equally disconcerted the others.

I proceeded aft, where some of the thickest of the fight was going on. Close to the cabin-door I found the brothers locked in

each other's arms in deadly strife. Neither spoke—both men were reserving their strength for a final coup! Three times had Ralph evaded Walter's fire. Waiting till he could take deadly aim, he drew—and bitterly cursed his folly! his charges had all got wet in embarking. Again did a lurch of the vessel divert the course of Walter's bullet. As Ralph felt it whirr just past him, he grew sick as he thought, 'Must I die before I see HER?' In the suddenness of the spring Ralph now made upon his brother, Walter dropped his pistol. Ralph falling underneath, clutched his brother's throat, notwithstanding;—he felt a convulsive tremor come over his brother as there he lay, and saw his eyes starting from their sockets; but another heavy lurch disengaged them.

In fearful hate the two now closed again.

'My God!' hissed Ralph, between his teeth, 'give me strength to—kill him!'

'Ralph, Ralph!' gasped Walter, 'she's safe! By the Eternal Hell to which I'm going, I swear it! Loose your grip,—my—*brother!*'

Ralph shuddered as he saw the weird look of old upon those features! Slackening his hold he felt his brother's hand now stealing across his breast. He instantly tightened it again, but too late! a poignard glittered in the air—he seized the arm that held it, but the warm life current trickled freely from his own.

The expression on Walter's face was fiendish, as he felt his brother's warm blood running over him, so thick and hot! Now came the dizziness and the faintness of old. 'Will it soon be—death?' thought Ralph, 'and she so near!'

Praying for one minute's more life and strength, he tried to turn the dagger's point; the vessel lurched, and shipped a heavy sea; the dagger flew from Walter's hand, and in a moment more was in Ralph's.

As the two lay side by side, panting for breath, a female figure advanced quickly and lightly to put a finish to the struggle with Walter's pistol, ere Ralph's hand, which now held the uplifted dagger, should descend.

'To bear the curse of Cain upon *my* brow through life!' exclaimed the younger, with startling though feeble utterance. He held the poignard involuntarily for a moment while he gasped the words, 'My God, let *me* die! SHE—is—mine—for—evermore!'

Before the words had died upon his lips, a heavy, crushing weight fell upon the arm which still poised the blade. He heard a piercing scream, and knew no more.

'Remorseless wretch!' shrieked Walter, 'I'm murdered!—*draw the dagger out!* ah—ah—ah!—help!—he—'

Righteous Heaven had interposed. Loud peals of thunder had burst over their heads. Vivid and continuous flashes played around the combatants, forking in and out, among the dripping shrouds and halliards, and casting a lurid glare upon the blood-stained deck. And Geraldine, paralysed by the shock, had succumbed to its influence, and thus became instrumental in causing the death of *her lover*!—unconsciously falling upon the blade and forcing the deadly weapon into his bosom.

Maxwell's eyes were starting from his head, and were glazed with horror.

As there they lay, a fluttering as of Spirits was felt around them, and a voice, distinct and clear, was heard to cry loud above the tempest's roar:

> 'But the fiend's venom was too scant and slow;
> To linger on were maddening.'

And then another, though she was still insensible:

> 'But this is sweeter—oh! believe me, yes;
> I would not change this sad but *dear* caress—
> This death within thy arms I would not give
> For the most smiling life the happiest live!'

And then the Spirits seemed to mock them as they lay. And Walter, grinning hideously, appeared to hiss forth:

> 'Here—judge if hell, with all its power to damn,
> Can add one curse to the foul thing I am!'

Chapter XXIX.

> 'Ah! rather ask what will not women dare
> Whom youth and pity lead like thee, Gulnare!'—Byron.

There was as stout a little heart down in the pinnace as ever woman held. Maude hears the conflict raging, while the pistols do their work. The clank of arms, the hoarse shouts of fierce, desperate men, mingled with the cries of the wounded, and the groans of the dying, rise high above the shrillness of the blast. Her little heart, though bleeding, still hopes bravely. She holds her darling sister's hands, now grown so cold, in hers, and prays! —what about? she cannot tell—perhaps, she only cast upwards

> 'the soul's sincere desire,
> Uttered or unexpressed;
> The motion of a hidden fire
> That trembles in the breast.'

and wafted it into Space—the Great Father's dwelling-place! Dark, troubled thoughts were chasing through her brain; why did God allow this, and not stop the other? While thinking thus, she heard a piercing scream above the tumultuous roar, and immediately the thunder burst right over her head.

Fearing some dread calamity had happened, she ventured to disobey Ralph's injunction.

Brave as little Maude was, the sight she met appalled her. The hanging lanterns dimly conveyed the nature of the contest. Some men were tied to the rigging—for by Harry's order quarter had at length been granted them—others were scattered about, dead and dying; while Hugh stood, as though he had just awoke from the dream he had told her about, silently beckoning her to follow him aft. She met four men carrying the brave Bungaland Soldier-Hercules in their arms; he was to all appearance dying. I left her, for she began to weep, and I thought it was no time to do that. It must have done her some good though, for when I returned she was inside the cabin, with Ralph's head in her lap. He scarcely seemed to breathe, and looked almost dead, with his features set, and his arm bandaged by his side.

'Good Hugh, where is my darling?' asked Maude; but no one could tell her.

'Wheere's the prittie flooer?' roared Billy.

'Bear a hand, my men—this way,' cried Hugh; and led them all below.

''Tis there!' cried a voice, and guided by the smuggler Jack, they were soon by her side.

'Poor, prittie flooer! well ee speeke to me?' sobbed Billy.

Tenderly did those great strong fellows handle the fragile flower. Hugh gently wraps a lifeless form in cloaks and shawls; half a dozen stout hearts are ready to bear her to the boat. As they pass little Maude, she reaches out her hand to *touch her*, but these men have a work to do, and this was denied her.

The storm now lulled again. The cabin-door was opened. The same female figure lifted a human form along. Geraldine's turned eyes looked fiendish as she lay it within a foot of where Maude was tending Ralph,—they dilated so unnaturally. The soldier's daughter held her revolver to the head of the insensate intruder; Maxwell's pistol was raised and ready to fire too.

'Why does she not fire?' thought Maude, whose pistol refused to go. 'I feel half dead already!—see, her hand drops!'

A wild shriek—a heavy fall—and Geraldine embraced the lifeless body, imploring him to take her with him. But little Maude had heard no thunder, and knew nothing but the tragic

scene before her. Was ruthless devilry sated, thought she, as she devoutly prayed for the removal of the curse of Old Trememdon.

* * * * * * *

'Steady!—wait tell aw tell ee.'

The rowers in the pinnace waited, then backed, and rested on their oars.

'Pull Jack! back Hugh! pull awl! gi way, moi boys!' cried Billy. The pinnace rowed over a monster of a wave, another and another followed; she was soon half-filled; all hands save Hugh and Jack helped bale her out. Another roller came; 'Hurrah, hurrah!' a hundred voices cried from shore, as high she rode towards the beach. A hundred forms were in the water—Trememdon tenantry of the old, old sort, all interlaced into a living chain. But, oh, that fatal undertow! they struggled hard.

'Gi er to we!' they shouted. The men held fast the boat, but now a friendly monster carried pinnace, Bluffshire tenants, and the living with the dead, aloft—thing never heard before—and lodged it high on the beach, and half inside the cave.

'Take in your slack, my men,' cried Hugh, as soon as he got breath. But before the wave had well receded a tall gipsy woman had seized the rope, passed it through a large iron ring which hung from the cave's mouth, and holding it with desperate energy till help arrived, the pinnace was made fast.

''Twas nobly done, old Peggy!' I heard some one exclaim; but Peggy's face blanched when she looked inside that boat.

* * * * * * *

Living Beauty, Sleeping Beauty, Dead Beauty—all three were in that cave!

Why dead? Who's dead that ever lived—or Gods or Men? Who are Gods? who Men? The Gods are God-like; are they more? When Men are God-like, are they less? Why dead? —She lived in this old Spectral heart! Ha! could little Maude have guessed my thoughts? I overheard her musing thus:

'Oh, Death!—art but a passage! hardly that, but for thy seeming terrible exterior!

'Thou'rt nought, but in a name,—a name with meaning horrible; but when divested of that cold exterior, a friend most welcome!

'Who breathes that would not welcome thee but for it? To bring us face to face with those we love, as we love none on Earth—nor ever shall! A Mother! with a Mother's tenderness, enhaloed with Youth's purest, brightest fancies, ere the cold world had stripped them of their fervid imagery! A Father! whom to love and venerate seemed prior Nature; whose words were

treasured wisdom; whose love was single, deep, and never-failing! A Wife! a Husband! what heart hath words to tell of these? The love of such can ever die! What have they done since they departed from our midst? How much they'll have to tell of all the wondrous sights in store—of Love, of Beauty wandering through Space immeasurable! And we,—what shall we tell to them? That with us nothing had changed, for as they'd left us so we'd left the world—the only world we had to think about—the same! no progress, — nothing! but rather of the two a Retrogression! Ah, Haini lives,—her name, her love, herself must ever live!'

* * * * * * *

Living Beauty looked around. 'Poor little Maude!' I mused, 'doth no one speak to thee? I'll speak to thee!' But Maude was proud—Trevosa's race were noble; she had her work to do among the silent and the dead! All those stout hearts had left them, preferring to battle with the wild elements than invade a sanctuary.

First she addressed the living. 'Oh, darling!' she said, taking a little hand in hers, 'had I but come to you, or only written!' Fresh sobs came forth amid the silence of the cave, their sole accompaniments being the dropping of the water on the surface of the still pool, mingled with the boom of the waves reverberating throughout its gloomy recesses.

To the dead she next approached; kissing her marble brow and lips, she wept aloud these words, 'My sweetest sister! thou art with me ever, and I am ever with thyself!' Again she kissed her, hanging around her neck. The calm tranquillity of that scene impressed me far above the roar of angry elemeuts. I had seen nothing to equal it in other Spheres.

She now drew near a third,—she alone with nerve and courage left of all within the cave, save one. She forced a stimulant down a dry, parched throat; his mind was wandering; he gasped excitedly:

'I'll take it! Have you another? Do you sell?—yourselves along with it, you know! I'll buy the markets—fifty markets—now ten more! You know the bargain, mind—heavy "BACK." You cheat, sir! Names—liar! Syndicate,—panic,—curse! I put Fleasaway up to auction,—here goes! Whoever bids shall have it. First one; what, no bidders? I'm a bear — I'm a bear—I'm a bear—a bear—a bear—a bear—bear—bear—be—I—no "cornering!"'

Now he moved and groaned heavily, and after a while, amid the death-like stillness, chuckled:

'Oh, won't we have a jolly blow-up when the bubble bursts! ha, ha! They're sold to the dev—' He stopped. The silence now was awful.

Little Maude raised her hand; her lips moved in prayer, 'Oh, Heaven! remove this curse!'

'Remove for what?' I breathed; 'a death or two—a faint—a—'

She heard me. 'Stay, Spectre,' she cried; 'say not that word!'

I breathed, 'Is Maude alone?'

'Alone!' she said; 'oh, never, with the dead; and here are living, too!'

I thought she seemed to sigh, as with relief, on pronouncing the last few words.

I breathed, 'Brave little Maude!'

She sadly said, 'Nay, Spectre, 'tis the curse of which I am thinking. A rose; a—'

I breathed, 'A blighted—'

'Stay!' she cried vehemently. Just then a movement was heard close beside her. She sprang towards her. 'Birdie, my own—my own sweet child!' she sobbed; and throwing her arms around her neck, implored her, 'Speak, speak, my own one,—oh, Heaven!' The weirdest silence reigned throughout the cavern; the droppings from the roof into the distant pool seeming to mock and heighten her agony, while the only words she now seemed capable of uttering were, 'My love; my darling love!'

Space may be motionless, and is; but there's a breathing in the azure sky,—a motion, too, in nothingness,—a something stirring everywhere,—ay, much, as contrasted with that mute despair which fell on little Maude, as the wee fragile flower sank, e'en as she rose, upon her pillow of white sand in Grimmouth Cave.

'I heard her move,' sobbed the soldier's little daughter; 'will she yet move again?'

* * * * * * *

A low moan escaped from one whom fortune had pressed hard that night. Maude tore herself away towards him. Beside the Soldier-gipsy knelt the woman who had first given him shelter. His wounds were long since stanched, and she was now applying healing balsams to them. Maude feels his pulse.

'No, no,' said she, 'no more brandy now;' and mixing aconite in water, puts it to his fevered lips. He drinks, and soon is fast asleep. She bathes his temples, old Peggy calling on God to bless her the while, and kissing her little hands as she ·ently

tends the Soldier-gipsy. She turns and looks like one rapt. A strain of sweetest music vibrates along the vaulted roof, while a voice, clear and sweet like to an angel's, sings:

> 'By this good light, a wench of matchless mettle:
> This were a leaguer-lass to love a soldier,
> To bind his wounds, and kiss his bloody brow,
> And sing a roundel as she helped to arm him.'

I flitted past them all into the open air. The storm was past. The brave Bluffshire hearts were gathered around the mouth of Beauty's cave. Suddenly I saw them start. I heard a crash! one loud, terrific wail resounded in the distant air, and all was still. 'Twas Geraldine's, and death with death was mingled!

She had refused to leave her lover; on his prostrate form she lay; a pistol was poised straight for Hugh's head, for he had vowed she ought to come to Justice! Her eye looked dangerous. Hugh had a wife and family. He had done enough for one brief night, and she was left to her accursed fate!

Chapter XXX.

> 'Foul deeds will rise,
> Though all the earth o'erwhelm them to men's eyes.'—Shakespeare.

One of my recollections of events which transpired on your little Earth is of so striking a character as to claim special notice in a short chapter to itself. When Hurkuleze was in the zenith of his power, and Todigrab could do pretty much as he pleased with other people's money, some little difficulty was apprehended as to the completely successful 'floating' of the second 'Backaway Loan.' The brokers to it therefore sent round to the Leading Bankers of the Great City of Undone a 'Confidential Communication,' offering *them*—a perquisite—of one half per cent, on the amount of *their* subscriptions, to one of the greatest human flesh-and-blood-traffic swindles ever perpetrated in those far-off days of which I am speaking.

And of course it was floated!

> 'And when Rome falls,—the World.'—Byron.

Part the Fifth.

Chapter I.

'He who hath bent him o'er the dead,
Ere the first day of death is fled—
The first dark day of nothingness,
The last of danger and distress
(Before Decay's effacing fingers
Have swept the lines where beauty lingers)—
And marked the mild angelic air,
The rapture of repose that's there;
The fixed yet tender traits that streak
The languor of the placid cheek,
And—but for that sad shrouded eye,
That fires not, wins not, weeps not now,
And but for that chill, changeless brow,
Where cold Obstruction's apathy
Appals the gazing mourner's heart,
As if to him it could impart
The doom he dreads, yet dwells upon;
Yes, but for these, and these alone,
Some moments, ay, one treacherous hour,
He still might doubt the tyrant's power;
So fair, so calm, so softly sealed,
The first, last look by death reveal'd!'—Byron.

In a darkened room at Grimmouth Castle, the brave half-caste girl Haini's aunt was weeping. Little Maude was saying, ''Tis but for a time; and then we all shall be with her again, dear aunt, and we shall part no more, unless we like, you know; and I shall never, never part from Haini. But, oh, I can be happy no more again without her!' cried she, with a passionate burst of tears—the first she had shed since that morning. All excitement being over, she at length gave way to the reaction produced by scenes so full of horror.

I passed into another chamber. Ralph and Birdie were kneeling by the side of a couch whereon now lay the beauteous Haini. Ralph was calm and self-possessed, but haggard. Birdie was paler than ever I had yet seen her. They were conversing in low accents; presently she said, 'Beloved Haini!' and kissed her forehead twice. They were then so still, and appeared so lost in thought, that I at once resolved I would leave them alone together, in the same way as everybody had left them when, down

in Grimmouth Cave, they had first become conscious of each other's presence; nor will I attempt to convey any impression whatever of the scene.

Chapter II.

'Oh, that the desert were my dwelling-place,
With one fair spirit for my minister;
That I might all forget the human race,
And, hating no one, love but only her!'—Byron.

The sun was fast declining. Soft fleecy clouds were sporting in wanton attitudes with outstretched arms, to bid adieu to his departing light. The air seemed full of mirth and revelry. All, all seemed warm and bright; but there was a wildness in the winter air which seemed to shadow forth a storm. Cold came the night; the mild and even balmy air of day was gone, and frozen drafts of wind were circulating in its stead.

Wonderful for Sir Manfred Locock, he appeared unmoved. He had been travelling abroad, and was now in the highest of spirits. He had just taken a patent for conveying all the smoke of Undone city under ground, and free of cost, to a region then known as the Isle of Puppies, where it was to fructify, and, in the course of centuries, produce prodigious wealth. 'The End-of-all-Smoke Company' was his; and he had been explaining to Miss Kureous that, in order to fortify his mind and body to resist all innovations on his patent, he had found it necessary to take a Far Countree tour; where, mixing with men (and women), he had hoped to imbibe a sort of energy which, if not innate, should prove a Second Nature.

Sir Manfred Locock was in great glee on another account. He was to preside at a Monster Meeting in Loud Park on the morrow; and Lady Beatrice and Ralph Osborne were at present guests of his!

* * * * * * *

All scenes were now over, and the Spectre was very glad of it, but sometimes they necessarily occur. Every one had, however, in this instance, allowed some rather touching ones to come off without intruders. Explanations had been gone into, and a calm appreciation of all the wonderful circumstances attending the deliverance of one, and of the safe reunion of two of the most devoted hearts that ever yet swelled with heartfelt gratitude, had been duly arrived at. Maude had handed over all the

contents of the reticule which were left; the whole history of Maxwell's forgery of Ralph's correspondence, the interception of Birdie's letters to herself, and of the forged cheque, had been gone into and disposed of for ever. Ralph acknowledged that he had been a fool throughout, and vowed that no more absurd scruples about letter-writing should henceforth influence his conduct in relation to— I really must decline to say what he called her—I do not know—I could not understand; I never called living thing such a name, if name it was; and, sir, you must really guess the rest. 'And only to think,' said he (this was in a very dark room of Sir Manfred's house), drawing his little pet to his side, and whispering mysteriously into her ear, 'ever since that night you answered me, for I heard your voice so plainly, Birdie darling—'

'And I heard you calling me; that's why I answered you. I heard nothing more,' interposed she in a tiny whisper.

'And ever since that night I knew you would come to me. Ah, had it not been for your dear little self, I should have gone quite mad—your own dear, sweet, little self!'

Ah, sir, I saw what it was coming to; and I left them—oh, for hours.

When I returned she was saying,

'You must be calm now, and get well at once, for there's so much to do; we must not give way to thinking; that would kill me, dear Ralph! we must avenge the fates of those we love so well.'

'Our dear father's—and Haini's,' pursued Ralph sorrowfully.

'Yes, yes, Ralph,' said she, with a little sigh, 'and—oh, dear, darling boy, let us soon—'

'Soon—very—darling,' said Ralph.

'When?—to-morrow? my dear old boy,' asked she prettily.

'Why—you see—they say,' said Ralph hesitatingly, 'it takes time to—to—prepare—(stops) Oh, and—also money, too,' he would have said, but didn't like; he therefore added, 'and there's the—business part—and the—your—I mean—why—*trousseau* to prep—'

'Oh, foolish Ralph! what are you driving at?' exclaimed the little thing at his side, blushing like the full-blown rose, which I could see by the fire-light, for they had no gas, and this pleased Ralph very much, it being the first he had seen for a life-time, it appeared to him. 'I'm talking of our visit to Welcome Grange!'

'Oh, then as soon as the Meeting's over,' said Ralph; 'and we'll take dear Maude and Auntie with us,' urged Ralph, greatly relieved.

'And Harry Somers must come, too,' pouted Lady Beatrice; 'the Women of the Old Countree say he has done nothing wrong, *under the circumstances*—that is not to say they applaud him, although I do,' she said, with a little toss of her head.

'I fear that will be the difficulty,' returned Ralph thoughtfully; 'he'll never leave his people.'

'His people are to come, too,' said she, with one of her old smiles lighting up her lovely face; 'they want such people down in Heartshire.'

'And then let us soon—' said Ralph, hardly knowing what he said, but looking at her all the while.

'Yes; very soon,' said she, all in a tremble, first looking at him, and then observing the depth of manly fire in those eyes, darting a hurried look away; and then I think directly after, another look at him, but I am not sure; for again I thought they'd far better be left together for at least an hour and three quarters—your time, sir. And I returned, and found the children prattling like babes. It reminded me so of olden days, only that Ralph seemed to defer much more to the opinion, the counsel, and the advice of—his little Goddess-Queen.

'And I'll do everything you tell me, and just how you tell me,' said Ralph, 'and now I feel quite strong again.'

'And you will write to me if you're away, even for a day; won't you, Ralph?' said the little three-days-old.

A loud rat, tat, tat, was heard at the street-door, and tap, tap, soon after outside their own room.

'A telegram for you, sir,' said a tidy servant-maid (Lady Manfred never would have a pretty one); 'is there any answer?'

Ralph read it through, and turned at once to Lady Beatrice. 'How long will it take you to get ready the—the business part—and—you know what?'

She motioned the tidy maid to go, looking confused.

'Oh, Ralph! well, I don't know; we'll talk about that as we journey down; but why?'

'Only that I see by this telegram Bold and Bold have got me ever so much money back.'

'Money! oh, dear Ralph, I hate money so!' exclaimed she excitedly, and with a long-drawn sigh.

'So do I, my little one; but then it's necessary.'

'Oh yes, I know it is, so long as we are down here,' she said, regarding him with such a look that I scarce dared to gaze upon her; 'it seems too hard altogether—to be obliged to touch it. How did they get it?'

'Young Bold telegraphs thus: "Hearing your account of Markham's case before the Committee, I gave your broker exactly half an hour to decide—wanted three days—"account" on, and so on. I said, "Jacob Cautilous Dapper, I give you my time; tip me the rhino by then—or chokee,—chokee! No 'sloping'!—but the tin!"'

'What a funny telegram! Then you will have that horrid "tin" again?' said she, in a nervous, agitated kind of way.

'I fear so,' replied Ralph dismally.

Chapter III.

'The accusing spirit, which flew up to heaven's chancery with the oath, blushed as he gave it in; and the recording angel, as he wrote it down, dropped a tear upon the word and blotted it out for ever.'—Sterne.

The next morning *The Daily Roysterer* was read quite eagerly; so were *The Age* (sometimes called *The Fulminator*—when it paid to fulminate); that 'high-class paper,' *The Daily Aspirant;* that independent little paper, *The Sphere*, which always gave such a roseate hue to subjects; besides *The Daily Oracle*, *The Humbug*, *The Flatterer*, *The Toady*, *The Minute*, *The Reverberator*, *The Peccadillo*, that plucky little paper *The Earth*, and *The Last-day-of-the-week Differer;* for they all talked about the Undone Vortex and of the Great Meeting to be held.

Sir Manfred Locock was in ecstasy, for besides being very well-to-do, and a thoroughly comfortable sort of man in consequence, he was now in a high state of humour at the prospect afforded him of ventilating his own little grievances at a great public meeting in Loud Park. Although Sir Manfred 'had a father before him,' and was constantly reminding his 'pals' of that fact, yet somehow, all of his former little ventures having gone wrong, he was at the present moment in a state of high indignation at the Undone Vortex having had the audacity to 'bear' his latest little scheme, 'The End-of-all-Smoke Company (Limited).' Such was the case, however, and Sir Manfred sighed for revenge.

Harry Somers was now in prison. He had been apprehended for the murder of Todigrab, and tried. Poor heart-broken little Stanley had been the chief witness; and within five minutes of their retiring, the jury had brought in a verdict of Guilty! The day had now arrived for his execution. A report had spread that

all the old Vortices in Undone city had burst out afresh. Ralph had been unceasing in his efforts to influence the people in favour of his friend, the young Soldier-gipsy, whom he had got to love with all the warmth of his nature. He had heard the worst, and immediately sought counsel of Lady Beatrice Playfair.

'He must be rescued,' she had calmly said.

'And how?' asked Ralph.

'By Heartshire's yeomanry—by my own old tenantry—and by all true hearts everywhere,' she replied; 'headed by his own trusty gipsy followers, and all commanded by me in person.'

'And I will be thy faithful knight,' said Ralph, with wondering admiration.

Lord Allan Playfair saw Somers daily. To all his exhortations Harry had but one reply.

'My Lord, you know me well. I glory in what I've done! I will die like a true Old Countree soldier!'

A messenger had delivered to Lord Allan a letter for Somers. It was in Lady Beatrice's own handwriting. The moment he got it he fell upon his knees, and passionately pressed the paper to his lips. When he came to the words,—

> 'Yet though thou should'st be dragged in scorn
> To yonder ignominious tree,
> Thou shalt not want one faithful friend
> To share the cruel Fates' decree.—BIRDIE.'

he burst into a violent flood of weeping. Reading it over and over, he vowed he would like to die that moment; and for hours and hours he remained in that position, crying wildly, 'Birdie! mine, mine, mine!'

Headed by the sweetest of pretty little women, and her faithful knight, on horseback, a large body of determined, resolute men, advanced through the streets of Undone city to the gaol where Somers was confined. Previously to this they had visited the Vortex, where they were met by an enthusiastic deputation, who loudly cheered Lady Beatrice as she bowed to them. They were Victims, and bore a banner with the inscription, 'Somers! to the rescue!' They were orderly, if enthusiastic—quiet, if resolute. They hastened along, passing the ruins of the Vortices, where screeching and unearthly sounds were heard below, as of fiends in torment, accompanied by volumes of sulphurous smoke. As they neared the new offices of the Phœnix firms, their foundations shook, and all inside rushed out, joining the procession. On reaching the gaol, the sight of Lady Beatrice at the head of such a formidable array caused the gaolers to tremble. They hastened to adjust the rope, Somers crying in a

loud voice, 'My friends, I glory in what I have done! I go to meet the Great Unseen! All hail, Glorious Unknown!' All were struck with his noble demeanour. No one could articulate a word.

A loud voice, which cleft through prison walls, was all at once heard to reverberate in the atmosphere. It said, in tones of majesty, 'Vengeance is mine!' Immediately the earth began to shake, the great doors rocked upon their hinges, the keepers quaked with fear, as each bolt and lock was either riven or withdrawn.

In the midst of vapours of the sweetest perfumes and heavenly hue, Somers appeared, and descended amongst them. He was enthusiastically welcomed by all, especially by Lady Beatrice and Ralph, and was soon in the saddle by their side.

The prison doors closed again, the walls shook no more, and the whole concourse of people proceeded at once to hold their meeting at Loud Park in a state of indescribable excitement.

Chapter IV.

'What stronger breastplate than a heart untained?
Thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.'—Shakespeare.

'God bless my soul!' exclaimed Sir Manfred, 'I fear I am quite unfit to preside at this great meeting; the wind is in the east,' said he, pointing to a weathercock which had not turned for years.

'Bother!' cried Ralph, 'I never look at winds; take a leaf out of my book—here goes!' and he leaped on to the platform like a deer, helping Lady Beatrice up at the same time.

Now Sir Manfred was a *bon vivant*. 'My dear fella,' said he confidentially, 'you'll have to speak, Ralph; I b'lieve I s'll take the chair. Now, Mr. Osborne, just come along wi' me, and let's have some "ginger-beer."'

'Some what!' exclaimed Ralph, with a look of horror.

'Well, say a glass of claret first, just to clear away the cobwebs,' his friend said, and then added, mysteriously, 'no bitter yet, but a glass of dry Moselle; no cham—see how it acts; if all's serene,' pursued he in driest manner, 'we'll have a pint of Number Two to our own cheek;—that settled, we're open to treat with bitter in moderation, top with O.D.V.—mind it's pure!—and we're primed.'

'You see, Sir Manfred,' replied Ralph, now comprehending his friend's drift, 'I'm not a toper! I've lots to say—it's in me, and will very soon out.'

'Ah, well,' sighed Sir Manfred; 'I'm growing infirm—'

'You wouldn't like me to tell you that,' interposed Ralph.

—'and get no sleep, you know,' continued his friend, not heeding the interruption, 'and such an active, overworked brain requires much rest!'

Sir Manfred had now begun to retire at nine.

'What is a Vampyre?' asked Ralph Osborne, as he stood before an immense concourse of people, who had come to hear what the speakers had to say at that memorable meeting in Loud Park in January of the year something A.D.

Of course it was densely crowded, so much so that there was a complete block throughout all the main thoroughfares of Undone, from east to west. The police, after frantic efforts to induce the people to 'move on,' had, without a single exception, resigned themselves to allowing them to 'stay on;' and they did 'stay on' everywhere. Judging from past experience what was to be their fate, they had brought their dinners with them, and the day being fine and clear, they did not have a very bad time of it.

The whole of the aristocracy of the Old Countree was represented; planking was laid down for ladies' feet, and Ralph had foot-warmers brought for the Vortex-brokers' wives, they looked so blue! but his warmth of manner so reassured them that they soon were as jolly as anybody else. The Park was crowded with a living, surging mass, yet not a sound was heard beyond the flutter of gay ribbons, and the *frou-frou* of rustling dresses. As before, the 'House' telegraphs were at work, and every 'tone' was conveyed, not only to the mighty audience, but to myriads in every thoroughfare. Again rose the majestic Old Countree cheer, and swelling in mighty chorus, it was wafted far upon the bright, crisp, morning air. A huge banner had been erected over the Corinthian Arch. Two hearts transfixed by an arrow, and surmounted by B. R., worked in clusters of roses, formed the device. Bands from several regiments were in attendance.

The young Marquis of Trememdon having just arrived in company with his brother, they took seats upon the platform, one on each side of Lady Beatrice. The moment Ralph saw them all thoughts of Vampyres fled from his brain, and handing his notes to Sir Manfred, he sat by their side, conversing earnestly. Captain Slasher, accompanied by Sir Oswald, Sir Watt Scrough-

em, and Fred Stanley, and closely followed by Hard-hand Tappem, Esq., M.P., the Rev. Biorlmenes Getorl, M.A., Major Laysayfairean, Colonel Groovite, and several other gentlemen, were now observed to be approaching, and soon took their seats, amidst a general interchange of civilities, Slasher remarking to the forlorn hope how nearly he had been capturing the Viper on the eventful night of the rescue, but that his steamer, the Vengeance, drew too much water to approach the shore in safety.

Sir Manfred having called upon Charles Markham to address the meeting, expressing a hope that he would be short, so as to enable business to proceed, that gentleman rose, and said that he hoped he should be excused from speaking, and begged them kindly to allow him to depute one well known to some of them to tell them what he had to say. 'I allude,' said he, 'to my friend, Captain Harry Somers.'

The cheering now was rapturous. 'Hats off!' was literally screamed from tens of thousands of voices. Harry Somers quietly advanced, his approach being the signal for an uproarious tumult, of which I can give no attempt at description. The sympathy was general, the admiration heartfelt, while the curiosity to see the Soldier-gipsy was unbounded.

'My friends,' he said, but still the hum had not subsided. After a while, the faintest murmur having ceased, he went on: 'I appear before you on public grounds alone. I desire to correct abuses of no ordinary magnitude. In such a cause I invite all to come forward to aid on the side of public morality and national honour. (Great cheering.) With a soldier's brevity, I will inform you that Charles Markham took a "case" before the Committee of the Undone Vortex. I need scarcely inform you that he found that Committee—CORRUPT! (Immense sensation.) Need I say more? that the thieves and villains whom he arraigned, as well as many others of similar propensities, are living in your midst, enjoying the endearing society of your wives and daughters, while they are feeding upon the life blood of their Victims! (Profound sensation.) Read his "case," and you will see for yourselves! The Committee are no men, or they would have taken up his challenge long ago. I am requested by my friend to say that personally he has no feelings of animosity against members of the Undone Vortex as a body — *it is the System which corrupts*— and that he is now, as he has publicly professed himself to be, ready to meet in fair open fight, before a jury of his fellow-Countreemen, in a Court, *with no closed doors this time*, his foes; and that, in that Court, he will be prepared to disabuse them of their fondly-cherished idea that the broad line of division between

Virtue and Vice is broken down—the plain, unmistakable demarcation between Right and Wrong obliterated! He is ready, so he assures me, to dispel the illusion under which some appear to labour; namely, that in consequence of the onward march and progress of Monetary and Commercial Morality, as cherished and practised amongst those inspired circles, whose proud boast is their faithful allegiance to that Institution known as the Undone Vortex, Vice having become Respectable—Crime is no longer Criminal!'

The mass of human beings congregated now gave vent to such a burst of applause that, deeming it prudent to absent myself, in case of accident, to my topmost bough in the elm-tree, I flitted off to get a good view of the enormous concourse. Some day I may have time to describe it. When I returned, Somers was asking them,

'Would you stand a man's deliberately putting his hands into your pocket and stealing your watch? (Cries of "No! no!") And yet the same kind of thing is going on every hour in the Vortex, without your being at the time aware of it. (Intense excitement.)

'Until Charles Markham assured me to the contrary,' pursued the Soldier-gipsy, 'I thought that the Committee of the Undone Vortex were gentlemen—men of honour—above the slightest taint of suspicion!

'What a mistake! Let no defender of the Committee say that they strive to punish offenders, or administer redress! Fraudulent schemes may be brought to light, collusion between members may be established, every suspicion upon which an "outsider" may have boldly based his charges, may be more than fully confirmed; "*large illegitimate profits*" may have been made at his expense by means of some secret organisation, requiring during its continuance more than human ingenuity to detect; the Committee may be forced to place implicit reliance in the despoiled "outsider's" "one plain unvarying tale;" but to what end? That the Committee of the Undone Vortex may be enabled to proclaim within its walls the Spoliation of a Principal—to admit his justification and his triumph; while they not only afford him no redress, and inflict penalties only in name, but, by their action, frustrate his every effort to bring evil-doers to trial and to Justice!'

Salvoes of enthusiastic cheering greeted this speech.

'*A bas le Comité*,' vociferated a little choleric man from the Polite Countree.

'They are all tarred with the same brush,' cried a burly-looking Heartshire man.

'Committee worse than any of 'em,' a Bluffshire man shouted.

Amid the general confusion, a voice in the crowd was heard to say, 'I've my "pile" to make next panic!'

'Damn your "pile"—no more "panics" for us,' cried another.

'I wonder how they like it in the Vortex to-day?' exclaimed Sir Watt; 'they're getting it rather hot.'

'I've just received a telegram from my old friend Fullheart,' said Ralph; 'it's short and sweet. *All sitting on thorns!*'

'Hurroar!' bellowed Slasher at the top of his voice.

'And therve 'em right too,' said Freddy, who immediately after resumed conversation with 'that prethiouth little darling! Oh! lucky fellow, Othborne! Thhe thmiled more thweetly than ever on me, Othie!' So he afterwards told Slasher.

Somers let them have their fling, and presently went on,

'Hence the "award" of my friend,' said he. 'They say in effect—"We are the Committee of the Undone Vortex. Let the public do what they like—they must buy their stocks and shares through us. They may be swindled — we will hang together; they may appeal to us—we will serve our own interests; if we can serve those of an injured and despoiled 'outsider,' without imperilling our own, either now or prospectively, we may perhaps do so; but—he must take what he can get and be thankful, no matter that all his painful efforts to obtain justice come to nought; and, after having got what we feel pleased to accord to him, we, the Committee of the Undone Vortex, trampling under foot and totally ignoring our own Rules, which he persistently brings under our own notice, will take good care to frustrate all his efforts to bring '*the parties charged*' to JUSTICE!"'

Flitting upon one occasion through one of your fiercest tornadoes, I felt my attenuated old frame slightly discomposed by the combat of the elements. It was the tornado of the year A.D. something—I forget—nor does it matter; it was what the inhabitants who witnessed it, and who survived its ruthless violence, pronounced—they had no stronger terms—'simply awful!' Now, sir, will you for one moment kindly permit the exercise of your most flighty and capricious imagination. Fancy ten such tornadoes, garnished with hurricanes *ad libitum*, mixed, compressed, and blended into one. Add *Chassepots*, Needles, Armstrongs, and Sniders, all dotted like salt and pepper on a heavy roll of broadcloth! These were but sportive breezes compared to the tremendous thunders of applause which now greeted my poor Spectral nerves! I had to flit, for I could stand no more!

Passing across Undone city I chanced to alight close to

Goodheart's office; near its door was a grand stir going on. Amidst the hubbub, 'The Financial Magnate Mukfellin's "needled" again!' I heard an insider exclaim; 'gone for a cool four hundred thou—won't pay three shillings, am told. He'll start again, you'll see,' added he, with a chuckle, 'for—he hath friends! ha, ha, ha!'

'I won't hear Mukfellin abused,' exclaimed a voice. Japhet Numscul—for 'twas he—proceeded jerkily, 'Mukfellin's a—a—an honest—er—swind—er—rog—er—I mean—you know—Financier!'

He reddened considerably on meeting the steady gaze of his broker, whom he was endeavouring to rob of his 'differences.'

'I've no doubt you think so,' quietly remarked Goodheart.

Japhet felt awkward, and observed that he had come to offer to pay one hundred pounds out of the thousand owing, he being well able to pay the whole; and upon Goodheart declining to accept it, Japhet, having foreseen this result, now felt relieved, and proclaimed that Mukfellin *meant well*, that his failure was owing to persistent, 'outside,' interested attacks, and so on.

'But who will lose this large sum?' demanded Fullheart.

'A host of small-fry, no-cover brokers,' replied the insider.

'And why trust a man of this description?'

'Oh!—easily managed; say, you want to do the trick—'

'Me! oh, Heaven forbid! say somebody else.'

'Well, say I do,' returned the insider, much amused. 'I go to Levi Sweep, an "outside broker," who acts as middle man—'

'Inter—middle—centre man, you mean.'

'Ha, ha! I see you know,' returned the insider. All laughed loudly while the insider proceeded, 'God knows whether Mukfellin had a "bear" lot as well—'

'No, no—I won't hear Mukfellin talked of in that way,' protested Japhet; 'he's an honest—he's—'

'Will you allow me to finish?' said the insider, eyeing Japhet sternly. 'From what I know of Mukfellin, I don't suppose him capable of it. It has been done, you know. Well, I fail—Levi fails; not during a panic either, when anybody may come down, and— "That's—how—it's done!" hia-hia-hia-hia—'

Chapter V.

'O Love! O fire! once he drew
With one long kiss my whole soul through
My lips, as sunlight drinketh dew.'—Tennyson.

'My darling Ralph!' said Birdie to him, after the excitement of the day had subsided, and they were quietly enjoying a chat together in Sir Manfred's library, 'how much the Undone Vortex is like me!'

Ralph did not say a word. He did not try to make out what she meant. All he did was to kiss her warm, pretty little hand, as it lay upon her lovely lap.

'Yes, Ralph,' she said, all in a flutter, 'it is,' and sighed. Ralph would not say, 'Don't, darling Birdie! what ever do you mean?' for Ralph Osborne loved truly Lady Beatrice.

He did not stir, but kissed most fondly. Then she looked sad, and no longer let her pretty little hand recline so snugly. That moment all was changed! Ralph could not rest his head, nor speak—for Birdie's face looked grave.

He gazed into those eyes. 'I'm like the Undone Vortex,' Birdie said again. Ralph watched her changeful countenance—he knelt at Beauty's feet. She bade him rise.

'No, no!' cried he, with upraised arms. 'Unsay those words;' adding confusedly, 'I know well what you mean! E'en were it true, my lovely child, I'd crave your deep, pure love for evermore. Now let me lay my head, my hand, my heart again where none have been before!'

Chapter VI.

But thou, false Infidel! shalt writhe
Beneath avenging Monkir's scythe;
And from its torment 'scape alone,
To wander round lost Eblis' throne;
And fire unquenched, unquenchable,
Around, within, thy heart shall dwell;
Nor ear can hear nor tongue can tell,
The tortures of that inward hell!
But first, on Earth as Vampyre sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt thy native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
Then from thy daughter, sister, wife,

At midnight drain the stream of life ;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid, living corse:
Thy victims, ere they yet expire,
Shall know the demon for their sire,
As cursing thee, thou cursing them,
Thy flowers are withered on the stem,
But one that for thy crime must fall,
The youngest, most beloved of all,
Shall bless thee with a *father's* name—
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame !
Yet must thou end thy task, and mark
Her cheek's last tinge, her eye's last spark,
And the last glassy glance must view,
Which freezes o'er its lifeless blue ;
Then with unhallowed hand shall tear
The tresses of her yellow hair,
Of which in life a lock when shorn
Affection's fondest pledge was worn ;
But now is borne away by thee,
Memorial of thine agony !
Wet with thine own best blood shall drip
Thy gnashing tooth and haggard lip ;
Then stalking to thy sullen grave
Go—and with Ghouls and Afrits rave ;
Till these in horror shrink away
From Spectre more accursed than they !'—BYRON.

EARLY the next morning Loud Park was filled again as on the previous day, for owing to the number of the speakers the meeting had been adjourned. After the usual preliminaries, Sir Manfred begged the leniency of the assembled host while he endeavoured briefly to inform them as to the real character and attributes of Vampyres. He was in excellent form; the wind, which had during the night veered to the south, having brought with it the balmy atmosphere which induces sleep. Like a giant refreshed he had risen therefore.

Disclaiming all personal intentions and motives he would, he said, still endeavour to be faithful and just. 'My friends,' said he, with the ponderous voice and manner for which he was so remarkable, and with that frowning attitude to which his prominent bushy eyebrows so largely contributed, 'I shall be short.' (Cries of 'Don't!' 'Go on!') 'Undone city yet smokes with unquenchable flames—still resounds with unearthly sounds which appal the heart of man ! Yet Retribution dallies ! If Backaway has slain its thousands, will not Fleasaway destroy its tens of thousands? You have threatened to uproot this Upas-tree. Threaten no longer ! Act, and delay not ! Decree, by the irresistible pressure of your opinion, the downfall of an Institution fraught with the Shipwreck and Shame of myriads of

Victims, each of whom began life ardent and enthusiastic, but by devilish arts has been encouraged and beckoned on in Gambling instead of deterred in the Path of Ruin. Then shall Retribution, long delayed, but swift and sure, borne aloft on the wings of Eternal Justice, henceforth have her sway!

'Vampyres,' continued he, reading from a pamphlet he held in his hand, 'approach by night, for the purpose of sucking human blood! Their bite is so subtle that the wounded do not feel it before the bed, covered with blood, gives token of the wound. So great a quantity of blood flows from the envenomed bite that it can only be stopped with difficulty, and the peril is imminent. Knowing by instinct that the person they intend to attack is in a sound slumber, they generally alight near the feet, when, while the creature continues fanning with its enormous wings, which keeps one cool, he bites a piece out of the tip of the great toe, so very small indeed that the head of a pin could scarcely be received into the wound, which is consequently not painful; yet through this orifice he continues to suck the blood, until he is obliged to disgorge. He then begins again, and thus continues sucking and disgorging till he is scarcely able to fly, and the sufferer has often been known to sleep from Time into Eternity. Those who are destroyed in this way become Vampyres—' Ladies screamed and young girls fainted.

I had been observing a gray-headed old man, who, during the last few words of Sir Manfred's speech, had appeared very uneasy in his mind, look, as I thought, up at me; but this could not be. Then he took out his watch (it was 'account' day), and placing it quite close to his eyes, and regarding it for a second, returned it to his pocket. Every now and then he shook his head with a nervous twitch. Up went his eyeglass again, and straight at me he bent his gaze. I was not a clock!—what could be the meaning of it? Shaking his head now faster than ever, and raising and depressing his eyebrows, and turning up the corners of his mouth with great rapidity, he all at once made a spasmodic attempt to move from where he stood, and fell down a corpse! It was afterwards found he had died from heart disease. He stood to lose four thousand pounds that 'account,' and had nothing to meet it with but a drained brandy-flask in one pocket, a loaded pistol in a second, and a bottle of poison in a third!

Sir Manfred went on: 'The only manner of getting rid of such unwholesome visitors is to disinter their bodies, to pierce them with a stake cut from a green tree, to cut off their heads, and to burn their hearts. Lying in their graves they suck and

chew their winding-sheets.' (Intense sensation.) 'It is therefore necessary to place under their chins a piece of green turf, in order that they may not be able to reach the sheets with their teeth, and to bind their hands that they may not turn about in their coffins. Yet, notwithstanding all means used to destroy their bodies, they resume their shapes and recommence their mischievous wanderings as soon as the rays of moonlight fall on their graves !' (Shrieks of horror and despair were heard to proceed from a phalanx of Vortex brokers.) 'And yet,' added Sir Manfred plaintively, turning to the Vortex-brokers' wives, who sat all together, 'you call such creatures by the endearing name of husband, brother, son ! If husband, you ride side by side in your well-appointed carriage, which travels on the wheels of Death, whose axles are greased with the marrow of his victims ! You never give one moment's consideration to them ! They feed your table ! Yes,' repeated Sir Manfred in his most ponderous tones, 'victims feed you ! Perhaps you glory in it !' (Here seventeen Vortex-brokers' wives and daughters fainted.) 'I don't say you do,' said he, softening at the sight, 'but the fact remains. Victims clothe those innocent children, the delights of your eyes ! Innocent did I say ? What, with their father a Vampyre ! their mother a Vampyre's consort ! An innocent brood of Vampyres ! A Vampyre babe—born from a Vampyre wife—grown to a Vampyre child—developed into A VAMPYRE GIRL !'

('Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha !')

* * * * * * *

That laugh, sir, was not Sir Manfred's—it was Spectral, it was hollow,—it was mine. No one else dared to laugh. At the ghastly picture he had drawn the whole of that vast assemblage shuddered as one mass. Everybody looked dreadful in their big emotion ; handkerchiefs and salts were in great request. I thought I saw—but in the excitement it was impossible to be certain—several hundreds of young girls in convulsions. Forty-five old men—God bless 'em !—were bent double. Brandy, which the thoughtful Sir Manfred had ordered to be upon the spot, was freely administered. Sir Manfred had certainly risen to the occasion ; I had to rise to mine. His knee-cap was nowhere, and the first burst of sensational applause carried him with it a long way down the platform. He fell at Birdie's feet, and would very soon have made a fool of himself, I make no doubt, had not a pretty little girl tripped up on to the platform, and, kissing a button-hole, presented it to him. Before he could make his acknowledgments she had darted off again, and given

Ralph a rose. Lady Beatrice kissed little Grace Goodheart, as she said, 'Papa's on your side, dear Ralph; but, oh, don't let us hear any more of those dreadful horrid things again! You won't, will you now?' Ralph kissed her little hand ten times, and Lady Beatrice blushed and kissed the little thing over and over again; but she was only ten, and Ralph was nearly forty.

Chapter VII.

'There was but one beloved face on earth,
And that was shining on him; he had looked
Upon it till it could not pass away;
He had no breath, no being, but in hers.
She was his voice; he did not speak to her,
But trembled on her words;
. . . . . she was his life,
The ocean to the river of his thoughts,
. . . . . which terminated all.'—Byron.

I must have been absent half an hour. When I returned I listened to Ralph's speech.

'*She* says, and her voice is sweetest music to the ear, "You're but a stripling, Ralph, only a ruddy-faced youth; but—aim at that Goliath!"'

The silence grew impressive. Nothing now was heard but the faint click of the telegraphs.

'My friends,' said Ralph with deep emotion, while a profound *movement* agitated the vast assemblage.

'Hush, hush!' all cried; the rising cheer was stayed. His frame was quivering as he proceeded.

'You've heard of Birdie! She's by my side!'

And if ever mortal looked immortal, Birdie did just then. Her lips trembled, and her wondrous features paled as he proceeded:

'Birdie has given me a sling; it's in my hand. The pebble's from the brook—its aim is sure; while she has another and yet another waiting to destroy the hydra-headed monster!'

In vain now they called, 'Hush! order!' &c. When they had had their say, Ralph pointed to the skies.

'The things she heard up there,' he said, 'about the "bulls" and "bears" astonished even me—a Veteran Victim! But she is down again, and she will help you, if you will only help yourselves.'

Again I left to view the scene. On my return the passion was full upon him. Gentle creatures were sobbing and hiding their lovely faces too. As I advanced, he said,

'I court the Old Countree's ear—I stay by her decree! The Committee of the Undone Vortex endorsed the Swindle, and, ye Vampyres! you netted your hundreds of thousands of pounds out of it. Some are gone to their last account, there to meet the heart-broken widow and the despoiled orphan face to face! But you Members of the Vortex who remain who had ought to do with that vile transaction, and you Committee who supported it by the weight and influence of your *Great Names*, are responsible for the fall of one of Eve's fairest, loveliest daughters! for you despoiled her father—you broke his heart—you caused his death—and thus by your united villany you ruined that girl's prospects in life! You have blighted her existence, and her lot becoming too heavy for her—ah! you know the rest!'

A cold shiver ran through their midst, but not a note of applause was heard, nor one word of encouragement given.

'Behold her now! the idol of the hour!—flattered, courted, caressed for a season!'

His gaze was rapt; his arm was raised toward heaven, as with an involuntary burst of passion he exclaimed:

'*Ah, mon infortunée!* with thy short day passed—with the stern reality to face—uncared for, and—alone! *Pauvre malheureuse*, take heart! thou shalt not be forgotten! Many a manly bosom, unseen to mortal eye, at the mere mention of thy wrongs, gives vent to griefs to which for years it had been a stranger! Thou art not without hope! Who shall deny to thee some fragment of a position sufficient to enable thee to pass the remainder of thy sorrowful life tranquilly—nobly! Ah, who indeed! Faith! —Hope!—Charity! But the glorious blending of the Three—I hail Thee!—Grand, Triune Sublimity!'

Ralph stood transfixed. Old men approved; young men were silent. The women wept, or sat with downcast eyes, but only for a moment. There was a smile beneath that shadow—a living, loving voice behind those tears! It came forth like the mountain torrent in summer tide! In one instant all—all were rending the air with wild and passionate vociferations. 'Noble fellow!' they cried. A throng of people surrounded him, and took him by the hand. Young girls were hanging about his neck, while he stood as in a dream.

'What can it be?' thought he. 'SHE told me so. You all shall soon know her. Oh, Birdie is so good!' he said in a simple, unaffected manner.

Again I trembled for my safety. A burst of wild applause, swelling into a perfect roar of human voices, rent the air. Rising higher and higher, it culminated in one clear, mighty, ringing

cheer for 'Birdie! Birdie! Birdie!' The air was full of nothing else for several minutes. When it had subsided Lady Beatrice Playfair stood up, looking at them all; and Birdie blushed, and then she pouted—ah, so prettily! and then she smiled upon them all, and they cheered the more. At length there was complete silence.

'Oh, why do you do all this for me?' she asked; 'it's very kind of you;' and then she trembled, and looked at Ralph, and he looked back at her, and she exclaimed in earnest manner, 'I do so love you all! I really cannot help it.'

And Ralph laughed, which made her laugh too.

'You have all heard Ralph Osborne,' said she at length. Each voice was hushed, and every eye bent forward, for her attitude was striking, and her accents tender. 'He has been a naughty boy, but he has promised to be better in future!' The laughter which followed was deafening. 'I do love him so!' she continued. Everybody cheered, her words were so simple; and as he sat beside her, she continued, 'Whether he behaves better or no, I shall always love him!' The effect was irresistible, Sir Manfred Locock coming forward to declare he felt he could embrace her and love her 'as a daughter,' he said. Amidst the general laughter, he stooped and was about to kiss her hand, when the next remark she made convulsed her hearers completely. 'Perhaps I am speaking to other lunatics!' said Birdie. The roar of laughter accompanying these words so disconcerted Sir Manfred that he rose instantly, and hobbled away arm in arm with Ralph. 'Ah!' said she, 'if your eye has lost its lustre, if the joyous, happy laugh of youth is gone' (she paused and looked around), 'if that throbbing hand which once was full of life is now listless; and, feeling life to be a burden, you cannot shake off your apathy and stupor, then, —follow me! I invite such as you. Avenge the fates of Fathers!' (she paused for a second) 'Mothers! and Sisters dear! Come, follow me!'

And in an instant she was gone! No one saw her go. Everybody looked at the place where only the moment before she had stood, but there Lady Beatrice Playfair was not! There was another blank in their number.

Ralph came forward and said to the awe-stricken multitude,

'My dear friends, Birdie is safe! Will you follow her?'

Chapter VIII.

'The Commons, faithful to their system, remained in a wise and masterly inactivity.'—Sir J. Mackintosh.

'Measures, not men, have always been my mark.'—Goldsmith.

Ralph Osborne was in the saddle the moment after the mysterious disappearance of Lady Beatrice mentioned in the foregoing chapter, accompanied by Slasher and all his numerous friends, with the exception of Somers, who was nowhere to be found. Sir Manfred, fearful lest a too sudden movement of a gaily-inclined steed might seriously injure the slowly-healing cap, which he rejoiced to think that day was where knee-caps ought to be, drove in his brougham.

In the days I'm speaking of the Queen of the Old Countree, unlike many former Monarchs, was one with the People.

She had several Royal Palaces, and had left one of these, and was proceeding quietly along, the second day of the Great Meeting in Loud Park, when Ralph spied Her coming.

'Birdie is all right,' said he, 'I know, and Harry and she are bent upon some extraordinary project, or else she would have told me. It will be a surprise !'

Her Majesty had gained the road by the side of Loud Park, when She presently saw one of Her Subjects right before Her, standing quietly in the middle of the road, hat in hand, and with a body of gentlemen on horse ranged on either side. His earnest, thoughtful manner, florid colour, and unusual mien, at once attracted the sympathy of Her Gracious Noble Heart. She did not order Ralph to 'move on,' although it was an unusual proceeding ! This consideration, however, did not weigh much with Ralph Osborne when he had made up his mind.

Her Majesty stopped Her Royal carriage, as Ralph was standing there watching his Sovereign with unmoved countenance, and quiet, respectful interest. Her Majesty all at once turned to Her faithful North Countree follower and said,

'John Frown, get off and see what that gentleman wishes.'

'Well,' thought Ralph, 'I've often said I love the Queen—I wonder whether She loves me !'

'I would address my Queen,' said Ralph. John stepped aside. Her Majesty then bade Ralph proceed. Bowing profoundly, he said,

'Most Royal, Noble-Hearted Queen of the Old Countree ! Monarch of half the globe ! Urged on by recollections of Your

Majesty's real love for all Your People, I venture to plead in their behalf the cause of the Widow, the Orphan's misery, and the Ruin of Victims far and wide! Such, I humbly think, cannot fail to enlist the sympathies of their Queen!'

The Queen, who had been smiling before, looked all at once thoughtful and grave, and told him She had not heard one word about it! Thanking him very much for enlightening Her, She gave him a pleasant smile, waved Her hand, and said,

'Good-morning, Ralph; I am so much obliged!' and drove off.

At that moment a terrible explosion in the direction of Undone city rent the air, and shook all Undone for many miles round. People shouted as the atmosphere all at once became charged with a thick, sulphurous smoke. Report followed report, the very heavens reverberating them. Leaving Ralph to do the best he could, I flitted to the spot whence it proceeded, where a most exciting spectacle presented itself.

The Vortex was in flames. Books, ledgers, telegrams, 'contracts,' accounts, bonds, shares, scrip, &c., were scattered on the pavement, or flying in the air half consumed, and the whole atmosphere was darkened with ashes from the burning contents.

'The Bubble's burst!' cried a voice I at once recognised as Fid-fad Lukewarm's. He looked the picture of misery and despair, having lost his eye-glass in the rush, and narrowly escaped with his life. Forty-seven Sternites were missing already, having been engaged at the moment of the explosion in heavy 'transactions' in 'Fleasaway' bonds, of which, as it had not yet collapsed, they were 'bulls' to a frightful extent; but 'bulls,' and order-books, and 'contracts,' and 'bears,' were all scattered to the winds of heaven! Now and then a boot, with a bit of a leg in it, shot up high in the air, or an arm in the attitude of making a bid for some wretched Swindle; but that was all that ever was seen of them.

Owing to the instantaneous nature of the catastrophe, the amount of the destruction to life and property was awful to contemplate. A huge wave of Retribution had shot in one moment from its centre to a distance of many miles before its force was wholly expended. It was now known that the whole of the vaults of the Vortex had exploded with terrific effect. After one tremendous shock, while the minds of the stoutest were trembling in the balance, the roar of falling houses, bridges and viaducts, with vehicles and trains passing upon them, appalled the ears of the boldest, causing them to think that the end of all things was at hand! It seemed to be one long, fearful sound and awful

reverberation. The horrified inhabitants darted wildly to and fro, many dying with fright on the spot. There was hardly a bridge whose iron and masonry or solid stone structure was not dislodged, turned awry, and rendered impassable.

In the middle of the consternation Ralph arrived. The heat and suffocation were fearful. He had been obliged to change horses four times, and take a circuitous route to reach the Vortex so as to avoid the intense heat, for the wind had suddenly veered to the East, and was bringing dense volumes of sulphurous smoke right in his teeth. People had already left Undone city by thousands, thinking themselves lucky enough if they escaped with their lives. Many of the inhabitants were to be seen wearing sackcloth on their bodies, and mourning with ashes upon their heads. As Ralph was looking up, the headless trunk of a thorough-paced villain fell with a heavy thud upon the pavement. For a few seconds it quivered with the most horrible contortions. A little further on he found the gory head that belonged to it.

Raskall's teeth were Clenched in death; nevertheless there issued out therefrom, in screeching tones, 'I am damned!'

Hurrying off in a nervous state, he now saw two forms high in the air, midst clouds of fire, holding flaming swords in their right hands. They descended rapidly; as they approached, the noise in the vaults of the Vortex increased, Vulcan seeming to be in possession, and holding demoniacal revelry amongst the iron safes stored there. Now a door would burst from its hinges and fly off with a report like a cannon high over the heads of the affrighted inhabitants; and then a safe, bent like a scroll, would be hurled in a wild, uncertain course, scattering and destroying as it went. Bags of gold shot up, flying for miles, and coming down amidst the awe-stricken people, their contents crumbling to powder when touched.

In the midst of the fear and dismay the two forms alighted.

'Ralph!' cried a voice. He started; Birdie stood by his side in white and shining garments. Somers was slightly behind; he was dressed in a black, close-fitting tunic, while a dark flowing robe came over his shoulders and reached to the ground. In large red characters on his breast were inscribed the letters U.V.V. Advancing their swords, Lady Beatrice pronounced the word 'Forward!' and Ralph instantly becoming changed like Somers, and feeling a sword in his hand like theirs, all of which appeared very strange to him, he heard Somers beckon him to follow in a most mysterious manner. They all three now felt themselves lifted in the air, and were speedily joined by at least

a million others similarly dressed and accoutred, the women keeping apart from the men. Proceeding direct to where the Houses of Parliament were then sitting, they were at once refused admittance. Raising her sword high above her head, Lady Beatrice pronounced the word 'Arise!' In an instant the whole of her followers had ascended and were on a level with the roof of the great building, which was hot from the effects of the fury of the blast. While they were awaiting her commands she touched the top with her foot; the great roof flew open, the affrighted members rising spontaneously to a level with the indignant multitude of U.V.V.'s. In vain did the Speaker call 'Order!' and the members shout frantically 'Chair.' In their tumultuous midst there was neither. With pale countenance and trembling voice the Speaker implored his unwelcome visitors to say what it was they required, but no one spoke a word. As they thus stood looking at each other, the male U.V.V.'s still separated from the women, an unruly Railway Director, who, owing to his having been behind the scenes on so many Boards, had grown enormously rich, foreseeing that if the Vortex were destroyed, one great source of his income would be lost, determined to make a stand, and in a white heat, trembling from head to foot, demanded 'What the devil Lady Beatrice meant by assuming such airs?'

'Lady Beatrice is at least a—a—a gentleman, sir!' stammered forth Ralph breathlessly, and with a look of thunder. This cutting reproof was scarcely administered when the irate M.P. became black in the face, and was seized with such a violent fit of spasms, that another member, regarding it as a terrible example, rose and said, 'Oh, Mr. Speaker, we really must—er—do something!'

'Smoke from the Vortex!' an affrighted voice was heard to say from below, while the fumes from the sulphur grew more and more unendurable. Members, thinking their House was on fire, rushed for their hats, terror and despair being depicted on every countenance; but they found the lobbies were all changed, and nothing was as it used to be. The confusion was now intense. In the midst of it all, some members tried to escape by the roof. Here, however, they were met by infuriated and long-suffering Victims, who, flashing their swords before the eyes of the terrified members, compelled them to retire. Some vociferated, others moved 'the previous state of things,' but it would not return as it was, while the unruly railway director, having somewhat recovered, begged to move that Lady Beatrice be immediately arrested, with a view to her being bound over to keep the peace for the eriod of her natural life.

In the midst of the Babel of tumult and disorder Lady Beatrice advanced, and turned towards him, saying,

'You are amongst that number who sacrifice annually, at the shrine of gold, your hundreds of victims! who would yield honour, self-respect—ay, life itself, for gold! The Old Countree does not look to such as you' (laying emphasis upon the word, while she flashed a look of withering contempt) 'to redress its crying wrongs! You—market-riggers, traffic-return-manipulators—who, to realise an eighth per cent in a railway dividend, grind down your employés, overtax their energies, and skin the very flints along your permanent ways; while you hurl your trains into each other at so fearful a sacrifice of human life!'

In vain they cried 'Order!' the tumultuous cheers of the myriads of indignant Victims rent the air, dividing the thick smoke which surrounded them into two distinct volumes, so that for a time all was clear.

In the midst of it the young Marquis of Trememdon and Lord Alfred rode up from the meeting in Loud Park. Seeing the wild confusion which reigned, they approached the Victims from the roof of the Lords' end of the building, and were gladly welcomed. Their appearance was the signal for a general rally on the part of the affrighted Commons, who appealed to the young Marquis—were not their liberties being infringed? was it not scandalous? &c. &c.

'The House of Commons is omnipotent!' roared the railway director between his attacks of spasms.

'The Vortex smokes!' cried out the voice from below.

All started in terror. Advancing quietly into their midst, Lady Beatrice, addressing the Speaker, said,

'Sir, the patience of my people has passed all limits. To-morrow!'

'To-morrow—what?' shrieked a hundred voices.

'To-morrow!' she repeated in prophetic tones, which were echoed by a million voices.

The Commons now descended to their former place, and the roof resumed its old position, but a gloom like a pall had settled upon their dejected spirits. Although it was late, and a Wednesday, a midnight sitting was held. All orders, counter-orders, and standing orders, of whatever kind, were, amidst the greatest disorder, abolished and wiped away; and that night, by virtue of the Law of Necessity, a Bill was given notice of,—read one—two—three times in the Commons and in the Lords, and signed with the most intense pleasure by Her Most Gracious Majesty before the morrow had arrived; and when it did arrive, the Old

Countree knew, and testified to its delight at knowing, that not only was the Undone Vortex destroyed *ipso facto*, but was by law abolished. And the bells of every town and village rang, running down the scale, 'God bless dear La—dy Be—a—trice!' and then up, 'For Bird—ie is a Queen!'

Chapter IX.

'There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture in the lonely shore;
There is society where none intrudes
By the deep sea, and music in its roar.
I love not man the less, but Nature more.'—Byron.

It had been raining a perfect torrent all day. Birdie and Ralph wandered upon the sea-girt shore of old Bluffshire towards evening, and neither spoke a word. It was now a calm. They stood listening to the tiny waves as they broke upon the deep, shelving shore, with the moon's rays sparkling upon the waters, each ripple seeming to say something to their excited imaginations.

'Fooer, hooer!' one said, and then they listened; 'fooer, hooer!' again. After that each wavelet said something fresh. What little wind there was came from off shore—there was breathless silence. 'Fi—hi—e—eer—ha!' said one which rose higher than the rest, forming a fresh bed for itself among the small shingle, and receding while others came on. 'Foo—ia—hoo—hia—hooa!' sprawled in another, followed by 'hia—hoo—hi!'

'What are the waves saying to-night?' asked Ralph of Birdie.

She did not reply.

'Nothing!' pursued he, as though in reverie. 'Who says nothing? Have they been saying nothing all these countless ages? do they say the same now that they ever did? for here the hand of man has not interfered with contrivances and protections all along the coast, or altered anything, and, therefore, cannot have changed their language and made them less natural in consequence.'

At length Birdie spoke. 'Ah, did you hear that one, Ralph? how still the night is! it died away so beautifully too. Oh, there's music in it as it draws the tiny pebbles down along with it; "whi—hiar-r-r—r-r!"—but nothing can imitate them. Yes, Ralph, they do seem to speak. See now it's spent, and receding gathers up for another spring—there! "Whoo—hiar—ha—hia—ha—ha—a!" Oh, I love to listen to them so, Ralph;

they seem to say so much; they talk more to me when they are tiny than when they are grand and crushing!'

'And to me, too, Birdie; for they are so much more soothing than the great rollers,' faltered he.

* * * * * * *

When Ralph had arrived at the Westernport Railway Station *en route* for Bluffshire, he had met a man whose countenance was not unfamiliar to him. In another instant he had grasped the stoker's hand, and, his breath coming so fast as to almost choke his utterance, had introduced Birdie to the man who had covered him with coke and given him a lift at the Company's expense down to Westernport.

'I told you I would never forget you, old fellow,' said he. 'Here, what do I owe the Company—*first-class* I went—for my fare?'

Dick, the stoker, vowed he was too happy to meet Ralph again, and didn't want the sovereign he forced into his hand, besides another for Armstrong, the driver, and the Company's fare; and as to the little lady by his side—

'Oh!' exclaimed he, dropping a tear, 'aw ha' often thought o'ee sin that day, maester, and wondered all aboot yer little 'un; —and noo to see her! 'tis tu foine! God bless 'ee boath!'

'And you, too, Dick!' exclaimed Lady Beatrice, 'for taking such care of my own boy.'

'And for giving me such a jolly warm monkey-jacket to lie upon,' chimed in Ralph. 'I hope you didn't catch cold without, eh, Dick?'

'Me catch coald, sir!—wi yu so neere! Why, miss, he *wor* otter nor moi boiler that day, I du assure 'ee! Ha! ha! me catch coald wi' the young maester in the coake box! He *wor* "beany," miss, aw can tell 'ee, ha! ha! ha!'

Chapter X.

'A gude cause makes a strong arm.'—*Old Saying.*

In all Ralph's dilemmas he now consulted Lady Beatrice Playfair. The visit to Welcome Grange had temporarily separated them. He was in Undone city, and hard at work; for even after such a terrible judgment from Heaven, with the nation willing to listen to any one who professed himself ready to help them out of their difficulties, the opposition to his plans was violent and obstinate. The brokers and jobbers still adhered, with a firm grasp, to their fancied rights. He proposed to communicate with Birdie upon the subject. She at once urged a

conference with Captain Slasher, the young Marquis, Lord Alfred, Charles Markham, Sir Watt Scroughem, and Harry Somers. Several leading Vortex brokers were invited. Ralph's advice from the first was,

'Open the markets. Stamp out Gambling; no carrying over; pay for everything you buy. Sell nothing you have not got. Form an influential body of men whose names shall be unsullied, through whom alone all Loans and Undertakings can be placed upon the market. Let every project be submitted to the keenest and most searching scrutiny. Don't allow such a scandal as Foreign Loans to be foisted upon the gaping multitude, merely to fill the pockets of the knowing ones; who in the course of two or three days succeed, by devilish acts, in entrapping the unwary, and filling the subscription lists! If Countrees, Near or Far, require money, they must exercise the patience and undergo the scrutiny and the examination of ordinary mortals, to say the least, and be content to wait until they can satisfy the would-be lenders of their ability to pay both interest and capital at stated periods. Treat them with no more consideration than you would bestow upon private individuals! Deal a home-thrust at Speculation* and *Pe*culation simultaneously! You will thus restore that confidence in the monetary classes which is now so justly and so deservedly wanting!' After a fierce battle with contending interests, his advice was taken.

An association was at once formed upon a grand scale, for the purpose indicated. It comprised, among its members, all the leading bankers, capitalists, and merchants of Undone city, which was then the emporium of the world.

These had long been desirous of dissociating themselves from the Great National Swindling House, which still continued to emit smoke and flame whenever an unfortunate Vortex broker approached it, in a state of drivelling insanity, to search for his strong box of 'securities.'

The new body was called, and is to this day, 'The Steadiers' Association.'

It entirely did away with the Undone Vortex, and had new and commodious premises close by.

How it came to pass that the Spirits below the Vortex allowed them to come so near, and how the Vortex itself became transformed into a pleasant flower-garden in the very heart of the city, are matters of history. It was long in coming about. Ever since that day a healthy tone and feeling have universally and triumphantly prevailed.

* Used here in the sense of Gambling. THE SPECTRE.

The old Vortex gang tried at first to break the new concern, even as 'a dog will return to its vomit,' but were very soon broken in the attempt. The Old Countree placed implicit reliance on the 'Steadiers,' and gave it their unlimited support.

Business flocked in marvellously, office room in the city increasing some hundreds per cent in value. Branches, connected by telegraph, were opened throughout the Old Countree. If a pressure of sales occurred, the Association bought up the superabundant stocks. If the 'bears' ever attempted to set to work, they were made to 'deliver' at the 'account' by the Association, and got frightfully bitten, the profits on such *bonâ-fide* transactions being applied to the widows and orphans, &c., under the former *régime*.

Clerks had now quite enough to do without lurking at street corners, lying in wait for prey. Lawyers had, at first, a fine time of it, for swindlers and their schemes were the special mark of the government, and so severely dealt with, that all attempts of the kind were speedily given up. Good, sound, honest business increased enormously.

Half-commission hawks, vultures, parasites, and hangers-on had a bad time of it, for there were no Victims to waylay. Good clerks were paid well for doing good business.

The young Marquis allowed the unsoiled name of Trememdon to be placed on the Direction of this great Company, which was Unlimited; first in trust, again in honour, in sagacity, in ability, in straightforward openness, in business habits, in punctuality, order, and decorum.

It also, and as a consequence, was perfectly unlimited in success. Ralph Osborne also allowed his name, as did Charles Markham, the great committee-fighter, his to be put down, and Captain Slasher was prevailed upon to do the same.

The Old Countree and Undone city had, at length, repose. The feverous restlessness of doing good superseded and usurped the place of that other feverous desire to rob and spoil. Men began to say,

'What fools we were! It never pays to be robbers—in the end!'

The young Marquis got back upon his estates, and glad indeed were the honest hearts of Bluffshire for a time. Lady Eleanor stayed a while at Crashum Hall. Bertha and Ada Slasher were very fond of her; perhaps the Captain had become so. The Dowager Marchioness and Lady Gertrude went back to Old Trememdon, and little Maude and her aunt with them. Nobody would touch that hundred thousand pounds; the young

Marquis refused, although he knew whence most of it had come, and so it was divided among the Widows and Orphans.

'Quite right, you know,' said Slasher, when he heard of it; 'there'll be no more of that sort of thing, you know!'

* * * * * * *

Ralph went to Fopville for a few days to stay with his old friends, the Fullhearts, previously to rejoining Birdie. He had written to tell her that henceforth there was no fear of any of his stocks falling ten per cent in one afternoon from the action of a parcel of gamblers who lived by their wits, just as card-sharpers do, and with whom the inhabitants of Undone city and of the Old Countree round hadn't a particle of interest, or anything whatever in common. One morning he received a few lines from Lady Beatrice; here they are:

'My lover dear,
So glad to hear
Of thee good cheer
From Fopville pier.

And now thy book
On it to look,
By hook or crook,
In lonely nook,

My heart doth yearn,
And fain would learn
If printer stern
Doth yet discern

Its merits rare;
That Vampyre's lair
Unmaskèd there
No more may snare

The simple wight.
And now good-night,
My own true knight,
Ralph Osborne bright!

P.S. We all are well
In Welcome Dell.

'BIRDIE.'

The Spectre, at the time, mused—'What book?'

After reading this childlike, simple effusion at least a dozen times, and kissing it as many score, I saw him take his pen and dash off a reply quick as thought:

'My Birdie! hear
How many a year
Thy spirit dear
Had hover'd near.

When lo! thy look
Hold on me took!
Avaunt my book!*
As by yon brook

My feet I turn,
While thoughts all burn
With thee to learn
The Vortex spurn!

A love so rare
As fills me there—
Ay, everywhere—
Hail! such a snare!

Come noon-tide light,
Or frozen night,—
In honour bright
My troth I plight,
Thy faithful knight—
Oh, rapture's height!

P.S. None e'er could tell
Aught to repel
In azure dell
Or mountain's fell—
All shall be well
With thee to dwell!'

Chapter XI.

Benedict: 'This looks not like a nuptial.'—Shakespeare.

'Her cheeks so rare a white was on,
No daisy makes comparison;
Who sees them is undone;
For streaks of red were mingled there,
Such as are on a Cath'rine pear,
The side that's next the sun.'—Sir John Suckling.

For the information of those interested, I will say, sir, that the wedding to which Ralph and Lady Beatrice had been for so long a time looking forward came off in a manner for which they were both totally unprepared, and the reverse of his cherished ideas upon the subject. In this, as in several other matters, he had to discover that Woman rules the world. At her special desire—but I forestall.

They both doted upon Heartshire, and loved and were justly proud of its kindly, noble-hearted people, who wished nothing so

* Quite incomprehensible to the Spectre, *under the altered circumstances!* I do hope it's not that old affair!

much themselves as that the two should come and settle down near them, where all seemed Love, and Peace, and Jollity, and Flow of Soul.

After thinking it over for a good long while, Ralph consulted Lady Beatrice about it. The moment he mentioned it to her, however, little Birdie couldn't hear of it, and of course Ralph couldn't.

Birdie had a feverish desire to go and see her poor, dear papa, even if they came back into Heartshire again.

One night the two were sitting together in the same beautiful arbour they had so often sat in before. She was gazing into his face, which appeared unusually flushed and excited.

'What is it I see in those eyes?' I overheard her say, musing to herself; 'the soul of Heaven is in them to-night, for all is radiant softness and joy! Is that not Heaven? Such gentleness! Such truth! Such nobleness! ah, that is Heaven!' And then she sighed and said aloud to Ralph, 'Who would wish to leave Earth when all its glows are warm, its tints are mellow, and its glamour is effulgent? Ah, but, dear Ralph, the day will soon pale into night, and with it will come night's dews—night's cold—night's darkness! And when its radiant glory's gone, a sense of emptiness steals o'er the soul; ah, then who would not sigh for Heaven?'

And Ralph divined her thoughts. And he told her he would go wherever and whenever she desired.

And they went the very next day; and at her request, the marriage took place in due form in the parish church of a pretty little village called Undersky, no one but Spectres being present. The Spectre himself gave them away—both, for they were so constituted that one could not go a yard without the other—but got them back again directly afterwards, they being his particular guests, and while the two were on their honeymoon tour, I wrote down how it came about. I will now read you an extract from Ralph's journal:

'1st of our month, 2d day.—Gliding away on wings of five hundred million space power (love, of course!).'

'33d ditto, 58th ditto.—Still gliding. Intensity much increasing. No flattening of markets here! ain't it jolly! More joyous! More calm! No wish, so far, to come down again,—not if I can help it!'

'Nor I either!' says Birdie.

'You little wee wretch! oh!—'

Now you should hear her titter!—you shall some day.

* * * * * * *

One sight I never shall forget. I saw her in the arms of the jolly old Marquis, and she was putting her own round his neck, kissing him and sobbing at the same time. Then she put her hands up to his mouth, for she thought he was going to begin, but he wasn't,—the past was gone for ever! but yet she tried to stop his lips, fancying he was going to say something. I don't think she could have borne that; no, not even there,—not that he wanted to, but such was her fancy.

And I saw the three together. The Marquis, although a Spectre, is such a jolly one! No one would recognise him, for he is twice the size he was before he went there. He says it's very jolly there, for you have no trouble. Everything is brought to you by other Spectres, until you have been there a thousand years,—which appears rather a long time, but it isn't,—and then you don't require anything more,—just fancy! The clouds, too, move to any shape you like. You have but to think, and a bed is made, millions of Spectral flosses keep you warm. The clouds come piling over you,—they look so grand there! Town after town you pass, and city after city, and these move on again. And all are happy where they are. And if you want to dart a message anywhere, you hail a thunder-cloud, breathing your words upon it, and straight away it glides, nine hundred million miles a stride, and fifty strides a second, so it beats the penny post hollow, and soon gets along towards Earth, or Sun, or Planets anywhere. That's how Ralph does his business. I put him up to that. He wires 'the Steadiers,' and he's so calm up there,—knows all that's going on, sees through everything, detects a cheat at once—nothing escapes him—but this seldom happens now. Oh, 'tis such a change!

The jolly old Marquis has taken to farming, and gets stouter every day. He's not like me, you know, sir; I've got a heart disease which keeps me thin,—only since that sobbing, though. 'Twas such a shock!

If any of your friends would like to see Birdie, why, only tell me; and if they don't object to a rapid Spectral journey, they shall all come, sir. No charge for going, however much luggage they take, nor fees of any kind.

'Love sought is good, but given unsought is better.'—SHAKESPEARE.

Chapter XII.

'Marriage is a matter of more worth than to be dealt in by attorneyship!'—Shakespeare.

'Oh! cease to affirm that man, since his birth,
From Adam till now, has with wretchedness strove;
Some portion of Paradise still is on earth,
And Eden revives in the first kiss of love.'—Byron.

Ralph has taken to pouting—the effects of matrimony! I shouldn't have thought it; but then he never pouts, he says, but when he's happy. 'Look at a fellow's lips!' he says; 'they tell you everything. (Jacob's were as thin as an upas-leaf.) Birdie's tell of Love—and Love is everything!'

I would introduce you to Ralph, sir, and Ralph to you, but what would you think of me? Introduce a man dazed by Gambling on the Undone Vortex!—introduce such a man into Society! Spectre Land is his fit place, to be a warning and example!

Well, he has a dear little Birdie to keep him company, and a snug farm which he persists in calling 'Young Trememdon,' to keep him employed, when the 'Steadiers' Association' does not require his experienced judgment to assist them. The Trememdon tenantry all help him to put in the seed, and show him how, for at present he is completely dazed, especially when he is thinking about Birdie; then he is always in those clouds, which they so often sit and watch—the views are so grand there! Ralph says the clouds speak to him; they are more beautiful than ever you have seen them. Ralph says, 'There are new shades, new tints here. Everything is heart, and everything is love, and love is Birdie!' Always dazed, you see.

I got hold of one of his letters, which, owing to his usual complaint, he forgot to send. Here it is:

'Spectre Land, 1,000,9th year, 10,000,9th month—day don't know.

'Dear, dear, jolly Girls all (on earth, I mean),

'We are so happy—Birdie and I. Do come and pay us a visit; always glad to see you, you know. Birdie will make you so happy! We're not a bit lonely, you know, and still shall be delighted to see you, you know. We're not Saints, you know, and from what Birdie and I saw of them during our short sojourn with you all, we can't say our minds lean that way at all; and we have the greatest abhorrence to "glorified Saints" of all the lot, or anything approaching to them, you know.

'Birdie is mine now—ah, isn't she just! S—ain't you,

Birdie? She's looking at me now, and I'm looking at her;—we always are! I was going to tell you a lot about what we do up here—how we farm, and all that—but Birdie won't let me. She never will let me do anything I want, because she's always looking at me, and she knows I can't then.

'You should just see how the clouds toss their saucy heads about whenever she goes to look at them! She has only to think—and though only the moment before they may have been piling and rearing themselves up like huge, silver-crested snowballs, shooting away one above the other, chasing each other about like fun, and threatening to burst into blossom in a wonderfully delightful manner, they become all at once transformed into gardens, for us both to walk about in. It does not matter if they were a thousand miles high just before, and frowning ever so, and speaking to you with their bold attitude! Birdie looks; in an instant they've formed themselves into fairy fountains, and lawns, and parterres, and delicious scented shrubberies, with unearthly music mingling with the tiny fountain's splash, until—oh, I can stand it no longer. I don't mind telling *you*, jolly dear girls, for I know you won't tell anybody, will you? Well, I adore the very ground she walks upon; not like they write about, you know, but do it, each tiny spec and everything about her! I fall at her feet in ecstasy, and then I kiss—oh, no higher than her little hand just then—sometimes I can't do that, and she looks so calm and unmoved the whole time. But is she? *I* can hear her little bosom telling those tiny heartbeats—quicker, quicker, and faster still; and sometimes I begin to wonder if she knows what is passing in my mind; and when I least expect it I find—oh, you know—of course she has been all the while, and then—and then—I sometimes get much worse, oh, very!

'After a while we both sigh, together always, and I whisper, "Birdie, change it, darling," and she gives a little start at the sound of my voice, and asks, "Into what, old fellow?" and I tell her, into what she likes best; and she does it with a thought. A wooded grove springs up, with myriads of the most lovely songsters flying to and fro. And they all know her, and yet they're not quite tame—I shouldn't like them if they were—but they answer to her call, and then seem half frightened at having been so bold, and she reassures them, and they warble her name so prettily, and soon they all fly off—I think it's I who frighten them. And Birdie says, "All the better, old fellow; you'll enjoy them all the more when they come back again." Ah, Birdie's always right. Just now she has made gaunt cliffs, sea-beaches, reefs, and rough waves appear. Oh, there's lots of room here. Do

come, you can all have the same if you will only come; but mind, —come mated! and you shall do the same, and be adored like Birdie! You only have to choose, for Woman rules the world; and everything up here is love—perhaps you wouldn't like it—and love is Birdie!—Ever your own loving

'RALPH.'

Postscript from Birdie—in her own hand. 'Oh, do, do come up! Ralph is so good! Ralph, funny fellow, says it isn't "up," that there is no up or down—well, I can't think it's down, so I don't know where it can be. Ralph is such a dear old fellow! He's always having Uncle Allan in to see us; and darling Maude brings in Tom Doowell as often as she likes, which is very often indeed; and so does Harry bring in dear, precious Haini, for they've taken a wonderful liking to each other (married, of course!); and dear Sissy and Freddy, but that you know, and Oswald and my own pet Eleanor—no, that's the one you knew, and Reggy and Grace—she *is* such a duck of a thing, and grown into a marvellously grand creature. I'm so small beside her! but Ralph says I'm *multum in* something, and that makes up—he says more. I don't believe it though ("Yes, she does; she's blushing!—R. O."); and there, I've told you all; oh, except—but that, of course, you knew, or might have done, for Alfred was always looking for her—Ralph's own little sister, Emma Louise, and we are all married, and ever so many more. All are here, papa and mamma, and everybody. Will not the clouds now speak to you? Won't they now say, "Come, follow me!" Ta-ta, and with ever so much of "the usual," which Ralph says is *fortiter in* something else—I forget.—Your loving

'BIRDIE.'

'N.B. Do soon come! Birdie is now at her harp, not a "harp of gold," is it, Birdie? "Gold! gold! gold!" she screams, and is now nestling in terror at my side. "Oh, my dear boy Ralph! never mention that horrid word again!" she implores me; and I say, "Never, Birdie darling!" it's the only sound that brings a cloud across her lovely brow. And now she goes to her harp again, which is mellowed out of clouds. Gold has no place in that harp of love! She is sitting rapt in minstrelsy ethereal, with her long, beautiful hair all falling about her in such rich profusion. I do have my way in that — but it's hers too—and it mingles with the brilliant, sparkling, fleecy cloud wreaths which are ever ready to form themselves into a harp for her; and how she touches the chords, and where they come from, I do not know; and she sings—

"Doubt thou the stars are fire,
Doubt that the sun doth move;
Doubt truth to be a liar,
But never doubt I love."

'And when I revive, for I always am overcome for ever so long afterwards, I tell her, in my odd way, that I mean to sing to her soon.

Loved one! thou my mistress be,
And I will constant ever prove;
Ne'er will I wander, but to thee
Will bring each tribute of my love.

For I never yet asked her to be my wife, but somehow she became it without; so I must reverse the order of things.—RALPH.

'Oh, I forgot; our children—I don't know how many there are, I never count them—require no globules, though old Macjoy often comes to see them. Saint Manfred (he's a proper saint!) ascribes their healthful, ruddy appearance to the warmth imparted by their flossy beds. Saint Manfred seldom wakes up now; but the Fullhearts say it's no such thing. They are not dazed, and stand no chance of becoming so.—R. O.'

'P.S. and N.B. Carlo is up here, and Ralph isn't a bit jealous! but I should be if he had been a she and she had been a New-found-land!—BIRDIE.'

'Birdie darling,' I once heard Ralph say to her, 'now we are calmly settled here, I often think about the things which happened on Earth.'

Drawing her to him, he whispered in her ear, 'You know, Birdie, you lay upon a bed of fever once?'

'Yes, Ralph,' she quietly replied.

Taking her little hand in his, he added, 'And, Birdie love, I who prayed so little prayed then!'

He was silent for some seconds, apparently unable to utter another word. Controlling himself, however, he, gazing into her upturned eyes, sighed forth the words, 'You could not have heard me, my child, and yet—'

'I heard another voice!' trembled forth the radiant little darling at his side, 'and after that—I slept so tranquilly!'

'You never told me, my own one!'

'I never dared—'

'*Dared*, Birdie!'

He looked at her and she at him, but for a moment. In the

next she had flung her little arms around his neck. I was not wanted there. As I withdrew I heard her saying to him, in tones which brought vividly before me the old, old days, 'It seemed—all—too mysterious, my darling boy!'

Of course they are old married folks now, oh, very! but Birdie gets younger in appearance every day. She looks beautiful, and changes in some mysterious manner, like a lovely kaleidoscopean nymph—sometimes every minute—it's wonderful! I don't know where it will all end; their love is becoming more intense than ever.

And the Queen of the Old Countree and Birdie are great friends. I overheard Ralph and Birdie talking together just after she had left them.

'So nice, isn't she, Ralph dear?'

'Who can doubt it, Birdie?'

After a pause Birdie said, 'But I do think she kept too quiet when she was down there; for a Queen, you know, Ralph.'

Ralph was silent for a time. Presently Birdie looked up in his face. 'Ah, Ralph! dear old fellow, what is it?' she anxiously asked.

'You funny little pet,' at length he said; 'who has been saying that to you about the Queen?'

'Oh, Ralph! I daresay I'm quite wrong,' replied Birdie; 'do tell me now what you think.'

Ralph drew her closely towards him as he whispered in her ear, 'You never were a—widow, Birdie!'

She started.

'Ralph, love, I never could have been!' exclaimed she. 'I should—you would—oh, you know! we never could have been separated! no, not for an hour!' said she, taking his arm and placing it around her neck, while she nestled closer to him than ever, reposing calmly upon his bosom. He strained her to him as he faltered forth the words, 'And yet, my own one, had I been taken from you, I should not have thought you "too quiet" when —with myself even nearer to you than I had ever been before—I found you, my own one, daily, ay, hourly, more conscious of my presence than had the flimsy wall of separation never reared the structure which only seemed to show, after all, how impotent a force it was!'

'Ralph! Ralph!' I heard her sob, 'unsay those thoughtless words for me! I never thought—oh, Ralph! I love her so!'

I heard her breathe one long-drawn sigh. I saw her snuggle even closer to him than before. I looked: she was calmly sleeping on his manly bosom.

CHAPTER XIII.

'Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that hate thee,
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues; be just and fear not.
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy *countree's*,
Thy God's, and truth's.'—SHAKESPEARE.

BEFORE bringing this unpretentious and unassuming history to a close, I propose, with your kind permission, Mr. Bull, to take a retrospective survey of a few events which, happening some considerable time anterior to the joyful consummation already narrated, viz. the destruction of the Undone Vortex, were yet, owing to my Spectral notes having been mislaid in a far-distant Planet, not recorded in chronological order.

Perceiving, however, their recital in this work to be a matter of some considerable importance, I at once hailed a fire-cloud, and with unfailing results. They are now lying before me, and I need not assure you, Sir, that the Spectre is, as ever of yore—ALL THERE!

Chivalrous M.P.s might, so it had transpired, discuss the *merits* (?) of certain Foreign Loans in Select Parliamentary Committee. Oily Swells from the West-end of the old Capital of the World might be paraded before the public gaze. Questions 'involving the honour and character of men against whom hitherto there *had* been no impeachment' might be raised in a Court of Law, occupying seventeen days of precious time, two of which were not more than sufficient for the lengthened charge of the then LORD CHIEF JUSTICE of the Old Countree. And to what end? That the barren and unsatisfactory nature of the law relating to Swindling Transactions might be more than ever exemplified? That the unsatisfactory assurance might be trebly intensified that once Dupes had been induced to part with their hard cash to some wretched Bubble of a Far Countree Oil Company, unless they were in a position to PROVE that its Directors were in possession of facts sufficient to cause extraordinary individuals 'to change their belief in the statements in the prospectus into disbelief' between the date of issuing the prospectus and that of receiving said Dupes' money, there was no redress? And that future Promoters and Directors of Bubble Companies might take heart and encouragement from the lax state of the law to sally forth more fresh, more eager,

and more ready than ever to entrap more unwary Victims; and while making secret, irresponsible, and behind-the-scenes arrangements with never-to-be-caught-when-wanted Original Vendors, they would be in a position to laugh at all idea of punishment, and defy Just Retribution?—!!

I understood at the time that the impression of most people was, that these questions must be answered in the affirmative.

Warnings might reach the Directors' ears from all sides—*both before and after the 'allotment'*—warnings prompt, ample, specific, and continuous, as to the rottenness of an Oil-Scheme. But this all went for nothing. So long as they were given the credit of having received the subscription money in good faith, it mattered not one jot what became, either of it, or—of the luckless shareholders!

'Twas thus indeed that, in the days I'm speaking about, quasi-nincompoops were privileged!

Now, a Judge was, in those days, a very exceptional sort of a personage. And rightly so. 'Tis true you could talk and think about what he said and did—nobody could prevent that—but write? oh, never! Judges were very much privileged!

Now the Old Countree had one especial boast. It held the Judges of the land in high esteem. They were (the Spectre never flatters), on the whole—TRUE! Like 'the fourth estate of the realm'—the leading journal of the world—they were 'above suspicion.' As a rule, their brows wore the unsullied *tiara* of—Independence. Their smile or frown was on all alike—impartial. Seldom indeed were they drawn into the arena of Advocacy, or descended to Strife. Therefore, the failure of Justice in the case of the Oily Swells was justly and unanimously attributed to a defective state of the law. THE LORD CHIEF JUSTICE, FUMAGALLI'S, charge to the jury was exceedingly broad, but then, so was the law. The jury could not agree and were discharged. The Oily Swells got off. Everybody remarked that it was exceedingly unsatisfactory altogether, that the law was wrong, and that FUMAGALLI was right. Indeed, the nation had long learned to remember with gratitude how he had differed from the decision of the Arbitrators, *re-Alabamation*—a decision as distasteful to every true Old Countree heart as the 'submission' yielded by a money-bag-worshipping government could possibly have been. FUMAGALLI had withheld his opinion, and he was right in this, as was his judgment proved to have been in many other matters.

Thinking I should like to hear the opinion of the Arch-

Spoiler's coterie upon the matter, I made direct for the Vortex in Money-street.

* * * * * * *

The cavern no longer shook, nor was the passage blocked up. Instead, an air of bustle and excitement prevailed. Wurldlie Mammon was in a state of high glee, for Hurkuleze had announced his intention of shortly quitting the cavern. As he patted the City Editor on the back, I heard Mammon exclaim, 'Avaunt, ye sulphur baulks! Farewell, brimstone—black pitch, begone! No more will I mock you, old Blackmail, thus:

"——Echo answers frae her cave,
Tam Samson's dead!"

Hia-hia-ha!'

'I'm not for going yet,' exclaimed Todigrab curtly; 'bide a wee!'

'Devil a bit,' returned the City Editor impatiently; 'I've bided long enough. Those five Oily Swells Fleasum has been telling me about have given me the cue. Commend me to such a jury! Three cheers for the LORD CHIEF JUSTICE! It's high time we put in an appearance, eh, Todi?'

And Todi said, 'The Oil Swindle was offered to "that eminent personage," myself, who, in the happy phraseology of *The Age*, am "not unduly disposed to discourage enterprise"—hia-hia-ha! yet,' continued the Arch-Spoiler with much self complacency, 'I—"would have nothing to do with the scheme"—the inference, I suppose, being that—I—er—' (hesitates).

'After my dear friend Todigrab—the Deluge! eh?' playfully suggested Wurldlie Mammon.

Falling into each other's arms, they continued embracing for some time.

When their affection had in some measure subsided, Todigrab sighed wearily, 'The Oil-Bubble beats anything I ever did into fits!'

With a renewed cuddle, the other remarked, '*Except settling everything upon your wife, you dear old fellow:* and then you always worked in the dark,' chuckled Mammon: 'pulled the wires, you know, making Fleasum and fellows like him come to the front!—ha!' (kissing the Arch-Spoiler affectionately) 'catch *you* tripping! why, the Oil Vendors and you are birds of a feather!'

Amidst the general assent to these axioms, John Fleasum, who I fancied appeared less emaciated than formerly, shrewdly observed that there was all the difference between the treat-

ment of Bubble-blowers hailing from the West-end of Undone and those in the City—'in the eyes of a jury, I mean'—said he, with downcast looks; 'just see how that Select Committee is sitting upon me! And yet I wrote a letter to *The Age*, explaining, in reference to "Backaway," that "in the despatch from the President and Minister of Finance the debt is"—only —"given as somewhat over two hundred thousand pounds."'

'Don't talk of "Backaway"!' cried Hurkuleze reproachfully. 'Ah, John! no Select Committee can bring "Backaway Deluded Victims" to life again!'

Fleasum was silent, and hung his head while Hurkuleze proceeded solemnly, 'When your office was being inundated with telegrams from Widows—don't start, John!—Maiden ladies—Clergymen—Retired officers, and Old men'—he paused; John bit his unclassic lips, but remained silent—'from every corner of the Old Countree,' continued the City Editor, 'begging for "allotments," John—on—the—faith—of—' he paused again; Fleasum eyed the City Editor askance while he added slowly, 'YOUR—GOOD—NAME!'

And Fleasum winced even more as Hurkuleze proceeded, 'And yet you were warned in time—'

''Tis false! By whom?' demanded the Burly Spoiler hotly.

'Ha! say you don't know!' taunted Hurkuleze.

'I—he—*who*, then?' savagely demanded Fleasum, rising suddenly from the sulphur baulk, and holding a ladle of boiling pitch towards the City Editor in a threatening attitude.

'By *Charles Markham*,' quietly replied the City Editor.

'Ha-ha!' laughed John, with an imbecile chuckle; 'he did —he di-di-d-d—and-nd-d—' he stopped.

'And *he apprised you before you made any allotment*—'

'And I promised to look into it—' interposed John sharply.

'And you neither did nor meant to—'

'But I wanted to "allot"!' peevishly interrupted Fleasum.

'Markham warned you that your prospectus was A LIE, John, for that, according to a high authority,'* calmly continued Hurkuleze, 'the real indebtedness of "Backaway" stood at no less a figure than Five Millions sterling! Yet you went on "allotting"! Do you not call this "obtaining money under false pretences," John? Will you tell that to the Select Committee, John—that Committee to whom you have *promised* to give every information in your power? Don't forget, John; don't forget! Hia-hia-ha!'

* * * * * * *

* DUDLEY BAXTER on National Expenditure.

'Ah! poor devils of dupes!' I heard the now half-penitent Spoiler whisper, 'little wonder that they should have no heart left to fight us when we have robbed them of their all, *and their funds have become*—OURS!'

'Come, come—don't give way, John—don't give way!' I heard the City Editor reply. 'The Lion is not going to lie down with the Lamb just yet! Hia-hia-ha! Not exactly!'

'But even "lambs" get nasty at times!' peevishly observed John.

'Let's change the subject,' said Hurkuleze gaily.

'Rather let's all hasten out of this, old Blackmail!' cried John, with a sudden effort to rally. 'What say you, Todi?'

'No! wait till I give the word,' sharply rejoined Todigrab.

And they all waited—*for Todigrab was SO knowing!*

CHAPTER XIV.

'Me miserable! which way shall I fly
Infinite wrath, and infinite despair?
Which way I fly is hell; myself am Hell,
And in the lowest deep, a lower deep,
Still threatening to devour me, opens wide;
To which the Hell I suffer seems a Heaven!'—MILTON.

MONTHS had passed. I had alighted upon the summit of the cross of the old city's cathedral. Lurid clouds encircled, and at times half hid, the moon. There was an unusual stillness in the ambient air. 'Twas Sabbath eve. I looked below. A congregation had gathered, and as they quietly dispersed I listened. Some were eagerly discussing about 'the fishermen of Galilee.' I had heard about these same 'fishermen' on the shores of Galilee myself in my youth. They were contrasting them with their 'Apostolical Successors.'

Suddenly the stilly night became discomposed. I looked expectantly around. Far off in the impulsive light I discovered an ungainly object soaring aloft, high above Money-street, immediately over the Arch-Spoiler's Vortex. 'Twas HE! As he steadily approached, leading the way across the city, flapping his huge wings, carrying Wurldlie Mammon in his arms, and closely followed by Hurkuleze and Fleasum, the inhabitants shrunk from the spectacle with terror.

Suddenly the canopy of Heaven became brilliantly illuminated—a cross gleamed forth with effulgent lustre, high above the old cathedral, the clouds parting asunder, and myriads of spirits fluttering in its beams.

'Go on!' urged Wurldlie Mammon, clutching more firmly hold of the leader, who wavered, turning to the right—then to the left, in a vain endeavour to escape the brightness; but whichever way he turned its rays pursued him.

'Don't go back! I see nothing,' cried Mammon, in violent tones.

'*I cannot bear that light!*' cried the Arch-Spoiler; and not all the entreaties of Wurldlie Mammon could urge him forward. Shading his eyes with his hands, Mammon fell from his grasp. Descending with the rapidity of lightning in pursuit of him, the four found themselves in the only spot which the brightness had failed to penetrate. I followed. In the impenetrable gloom I overheard, above the hootings and execrations of the mob, and the crackling of the flames as they leaped up, licking the victims whom they embraced afresh:

'Hail, Arch-Spoiler's Vortex, hail once more! Farewell, ye shattered hopes—hopes raised by me—and quenched in DEATH!' —'All,' he continued, in stifled accents, 'yea—all—all lie at—THE VORTEX DOOR!—my Shame—my Ruin—my—CURSE!'

And I—the Spectre—trembled as I heard another voice proclaim, 'Oh, mystery of mysteries! A Vortex within a Christian city—that city the Capital of a—Most Christian Countree—a Countree whose Archbishops, whose Bishops, and whose Priests are—the Successors of—"the fishermen of Galilee!"'

* * * * * * *

As the Vortex closed in upon them, I again listened: Hurkuleze continued derisively, 'A Christian land indeed! Ye "fishermen of Galilee!"—ay, Thou—whose "yoke is easy"—whose "burden is light," when shall the Vortex-yoke be riven asunder— its intolerable paralysing "burden" be shattered and rooted out from the land? Welcome any "retreat" from such a Christian land!'

CHAPTER XV.

'——O! it is excellent
To have a giant's strength; but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant.'—SHAKESPEARE.

SINCE the great Bobberie Action for libel, *The Age* had, apparently, mended its ways—a little. O, it *was* difficult—the up-hill path was so steep and slippery! For instance, it had removed its City staff to its new and commodious premises in

the Queen's own street, away from City Clatter, City influence —*City manners!*

Now, the people of the Old Countree were very justly proud of this 'fourth estate of the realm.'

Go where you might, in the days I'm talking about, even to the uttermost parts of your little Earth, the first question in every Old Countree-an's mind, on rising in the morning, was —after breakfast, of course—could he see the latest files of *The Age?* If he could not, he felt uneasy in his mind until he could. And when he had, he studied it, and talked about what it said very much more than he did about—well, say his Bible—or indeed any other book, pamphlet, or work, that was ever written—that is, the average Old Countree-an. Of course, arbitrary acts were sometimes committed by the leading journal of the world, even under the new *régime.* For instance, one day I followed Charles Markham into the private room of the new City Editor. Within a few hours of the appearance of Fleasum's letter in the City Article of *The Age* he had handed him one for insertion upon the same subject.

'*Audi alteram partem!*' urged he. Devious listened, and —promised to 'consider.' Here it is:

'THE "BACKAWAY LOANS."

To the Editor of *The Age.*

'Sir,—As in your issue of to-day there appears a letter from the firm who introduced the "Backaway Loans" upon the Undone market, with a view to exculpate themselves upon the score of ignorance of the real indebtedness of "Backaway" at the time of their introduction, I may say that I waited upon that firm long before the first loan was allotted, and pointed out to them that instead of the real indebtedness of "Backaway" being, as stated in their prospectus, "about two hundred thousand pounds," it really was, at that time, according to DUDLEY BAXTER'S work on *National Expenditure,* 5,000,000*l.* I need scarcely say that they entirely ignored my authority, and declined to make any inquiry, although strongly urged by me to do so, before proceeding to allotment.—I am, &c. INVESTOR.'

The following morning I was watching Markham's indignant, troubled countenance, as he threw *The Age* from him in disgust. Turning to Goodheart, he exclaimed passionately, 'What devilry! even as it was in the days of Hurkuleze—when I so fruitlessly strove to warn the public of the enormous indebted-

ness of "Backaway"—so it is in those of his successor! *Must it ever remain so?*'

I left them; but not before Goodheart had let slip the words, 'Why, Devious was a "Backaway" Ringleader—'

'A what?' interposed the other breathlessly.

'A "Backaway" Syndic!' replied Goodheart confidently.

And the Spectre laughed 'Ha-ha!' Both turned to look! —but I was gone!!

* * * * * * *

Undoubtedly, however, all agreed in this—that when the time had come, *or very nearly*—for a thing to happen—or 'come off'—why, *The Age* advocated it, but seldom before; and that when it did advocate a cause it did so in such a way and with such undoubted talent, weight, and ponderous manner, that left very little to be done to turn the scale.

'What does *The Age* say?' asked everybody—everywhere. And supposing *The Age* took a strong view upon any point, this was, in the far-off days of which I am now speaking, a certain indication that such point was under serious consideration in highly influential quarters.

Again too, when the Old Countree was supposed to be in danger, either from combined or single attacks of neighbouring or distant foes, a warning note sounded in the columns of *The Age* was sure to provoke comment in almost every other journal, and insure attention throughout the world. Indeed, if persisted in, its ardour had, at critical times of the Old Countree's history, been known to arouse the apathy of the most sluggish officials in the highest offices of State. Little wonder then that the people were as jealous of everything affecting its honour as they were of their own—many, very many, relying upon it exclusively for intelligence, guidance, and judgment. Nay, such were the confidence and regard indulged by the mass of the people in and towards this great journal, that the revelations which came out during the course of the Great Bobberie Action produced effects upon most men similar to the operation of drawing a great back double-tooth by an unskilful practitioner—the WRENCH to their nervous system being somewhat analogous.

The inhabitants of Undone and of the Old Countree round, therefore, were indeed rejoiced to see the change that had been wrought in the conduct of the Money Article of *The Age*. Not that they were by any means *quite* resigned or happy; for the old adage,

'Once bitten, twice shy,'

often recurred to their minds with painful vividness, and was difficult to be got rid of. Knowing ones said that perhaps it was better not to try. Anyhow, it was of not much use trying for a long, very long time.

As to Todigrab, before he was forced to descend to his Vortex, he certainly had not mended *his* ways! True, he would give twenty-five sovereigns to an importunate white-chokered parson asking for only a guinea, and was otherwise inclined to be liberal with other people's money. How the people could be prevailed upon to accept it, the Spectre could never understand; for had not those twenty-five pounds, and other similar gifts, been wrung from the Widow's slender mite?—from the Orphan's precarious sustenance?

Anyhow, on one point everybody's mind was now set at rest: Todigrab's remains would certainly *not* find a peaceful resting-place either beneath Undone's Venerable Old Abbey or in any conceivable National Walhalla, in company with the great and good interred there, with a monument erected by a grateful nation to the memory of—

THE GREAT BACK-SLUM-BEAUTIFIER!!

Chapter XVI.

'I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning:
Alas! the gratitude of men
Hath oftener left me mourning.'—Wordsworth.

And now, Mr. Bull, allow me to thank you very sincerely for the trouble you have taken in reading my necessarily somewhat digressive narrative. I do thank you; and the Spectre is like you in one respect—when he says a thing he means it. It is for you to judge of its merits or otherwise. If it possesses but one claim, however, to your acceptance and approval,—and I fearlesly and unhesitatingly submit to your verdict in this as in every other respect,—you will not be slow to detect it.

I am also eternally grateful,—it is not permitted to Spectres to use endearing terms, or I might say more,—but I am and shall ever be grateful to that noble ancestor of yours for his kind permission to dedicate my work to him, and through him to you. I am constantly meeting him, for he and his boys of Vortex memory are devoted admirers of Birdie's, and he stands godfather to the prettiest little Birdie, sir, that ever you did see! I take this opportunity of publicly proclaiming my sentiments.

I only take up my pen this morning to record the undisguised pleasure I experienced while flitting through the garden which had sprung up on the site of the once notorious Undone Vortex to find the centre avenue, which is so prettily lined with a double row of gigantic rose-trees, with fountains playing at either end, named after the Spectre's little darling pet of pets. Oh, I hope Ralph doesn't hear!—not that it much matters now, what with all those children climbing about, and me so lank; yet, she's Birdie still, and I have to take care, for he's a funny sort of fellow! Well, sir, to find it called THE ROSE WALK, and further on BIRDIE'S AVENUE; and that, notwithstanding all the smoke of the city, the roses thrive and flourish as well there as they do in Spectre Land! And yet it's not strange, if you only knew how it all came about,—and some day, if I have time, and you have inclination, I'll tell you.

I pondered, and all at once thought: Well, here some hidden influence must be at work! else, how could such things happen? But while this appeared surpassingly strange, other things seemed stranger still! There was first the extraordinary fact which all at once recurred to my mind, viz. that for so long a time the inhabitants of the city of Undone and of the Old Countree round had allowed such a fearfully horrible nuisance as the Undone Vortex to exist!

I was fairly lost in wonder, and am now; for when I see the peace, the happiness, the serenity, the confidence, and the Love pervading all classes of the inhabitants, with trifling exceptions, and contrast it with the frightful disorders to which they then allowed—ay, you, sir, can scarcely credit it now!—calmly allowed themselves to be made, by a lot of designing, audacious, unscrupulous, and wanton men,—A PREY!—oh, I have no words to tell of the sense of utter bewilderment that seized and almost shattered my poor Spectral nerves at the bare remembrance of so astounding and prodigious a spectacle!

And a most extraordinary thing happened as I was flitting through Birdie's Avenue. The head-gardeners, as generations followed one another, had never succeeded in getting the grass to grow or plants to thrive in a certain part of the grounds, where in ages gone by the 'Foreign Market' used to stand. The man now in office was having it dug over afresh; but, as it had been excavated by his predecessors to a depth of nearly two miles, he had little hope of being able to trace out the cause or eradicate the evil. At the very moment, however, when he was engaged superintending the five hundredth attempt at unearthing the mischief, a navvy cried out from the bottom,

in tones of utter desperation, that he could get no lower, as it was a mass of solid iron.

Blasting-powder and tools were immediately procured; but, before they could make any fresh essay, the ground began to quake under their feet, and the workmen got away in time with great difficulty.

They were no sooner landed safely on the pit's edge than, with a noise resembling the roar of a volcano, the whole mass of iron rock shot up and flew out with inconceivable velocity into mid air.

Whither it went no one knew, for it was never seen to fall to earth. Fragments of half-consumed paper descended in showers; which, upon being handled, flew into dust, not before they were carefully examined, however, and pronounced upon competent authority to be the calcined remnants of BACKAWAY BONDS!

And the men stood by in expectant terror; but I soon reassured them, and ordered in a barrel of beer to revive them. While they had turned to drink, I pronounced the name of Birdie, and to the astonishment of the workmen, the head-gardener, and the assembled spectators, the earth began to close and fill up again, and a lovely fountain was soon playing on the spot in jets of rose-water, scattering its delicious fragrance in their midst, while strains of heavenly music enchanted them, as each hard-working labourer stood leaning over his pick or shovel for hours, just as he was when it began—unable to move or stir; and there they were when I left. It was such a picture! Perhaps the beer added to the warmth of their admiration,—it would have done to mine, had I been able to contain so healthful and refreshing a beverage! And I saw no drawn faces, no livid looks, and but little to distract and worry them,—and there were no Saints to be seen anywhere; and if they got a little jaded by honest toil, they at once resorted to Birdie's flower-garden—Bankers, Merchants, Clerks, Mechanics, all—and there they bless the name of Birdie!

And whenever the people pray for the reigning Monarch of the Old Countree in the churches of the land, they do not forget to thank HIM for the Queen who reigned in those days, coupling Her Name with that of Birdie! Why, sir, those two live as much now in the hearts of the people as they did then!

All things else have faded and passed away, but such hearts never die, and that is very, very long ago!

Chapter XVII.

'When age chills the blood, when our pleasures are past—
For years fleet away with the wings of the dove—
The dearest remembrance will still be the last,
Our sweetest memorial the first kiss of love.'—Byron.

Now, although their loves tired not, becoming, indeed, fresher and stronger every day, yet I thought I perceived, in one of them at least, the veriest shadow of a bit of curiosity.

'You see, dear old boy,' said Birdie to Ralph, when they were sitting together after an unusually busy day at his post, —for telegram after telegram had come in from Earth, and he had been replying to them—'you see, we have been here now,— oh, ever so many thousands of years, and yet we have never—' She paused, and Ralph gazed upon her only for a second, for he at once divined her thoughts.

'My wee little one,' he said, pressing her fondly to him, his children all looking on in wonderment, 'indeed we have!'

'Have we?' she asked, with a look of indescribable emotion and wonder.

Starting up and trembling violently, she looked around her with visible emotion depicted on her wondrous features, then suddenly exclaimed, 'Why so we have, I never thought of that! He is here—here—here—everywhere; of course He is! and I not to have known that! Oh, Ralph, Ralph!' exclaimed she, falling into his outstretched arms, 'indeed He is! we see Him every moment of our lives, feel His sweet presence everywhere, and just as we act, so—'

'So what, Birdie?' he asked.

'Ah, you know!' she replied; 'and fancy me preaching to you!'

'I love your sermons, Birdie.'

'They're never too long, old boy.'

'They're never long enough for me. Hullo, there's another fire-cloud!'

And Ralph was at his post in a moment. When he returned he told her that in addition to 'the business part' there was a short account flashed from Earth of a man having lost a thousand pound—'

All at once her bright, gay look was gone. Perceiving the cause, he said, embracing her, 'Don't shiver so, darling; it isn't here, you know.'

'Go on, dear old boy,' she faltered, looking him full in the face, but changing colour every moment.

'A thousand pou—oh, you little—'

He could not finish. She interposed with downcast eyes, and implored him with a slight tremble in her accent, 'Go on.'

He continued, '—nd bank no— Birdie, love, it—'

'Do go on, old boy,' she besought him, shaking like a leaf at the mention of the word 'note.'

'Yes, dear Ralph, well?' she now said with a little confidence.

'You won't let me, love; you shiver so violently. Well, he put a notice up thus, "Lost, a thou—" oh! and all the rest. "Whoever will bring the same to the landlord of the Hog and Sparrow will receive best thanks."'

'Capital!' shrieked Birdie, and the merriment of the youngsters knew no bounds.

'Yes, but the best's to come; within an hour it was brought by a common, or rather an uncommon labourer, with such an honest smile on his face, and he was so delighted, and told the Hog and Sparrow's landlord that it was the happiest day of his life to feel that *he had been trusted*, and this was at Fopville. The lines the youngsters were singing last night are commemorative of an event which happened there.'

'Get little Reggy to repeat them,' said she, 'will you, Ralph? for I was absent.'

Little Reginald Ralph Birdie Osborne, who, in company with his younger brother, Alfred Ernest Birdie Osborne, was about to mount his pony for a ride together over to Lord Allan's, immediately responded to the call, and gave them the following version, which was in the main a correct one. Clearing his juvenile throat he began:

WITHOUT THE LORD.

'A girl I met in years bygone,
Who spoke to me about "the word;"
'Twas night; said she—we were alone—
"I fear you are 'without the Lord.'"

"Without!" I said; "then pray who's with?"
Ah! now I'd struck a tender chord,
As sighing, all her kin and kith
She thought might be "without the Lord."

"Now list!" I cried, "I'm much too humble
To think that I can p'raps afford
To be without! Sure I should tumble
In saddest scrapes 'without the Lord.'

"So tell me, please, at your own pace—
Nor cut it short; I sha'n't be bored—
What I should do t' avoid disgrace,
For I'd not rest 'without the Lord.'"

Said she, "On Friday next there'll be
Long prayers to Him—by all adored;
So come, and then you'll quickly see
How loud they groan 'without the Lord.'"

"A prayer-meeting's a thing I hate—
To see each creature looking toward
They know not what," I said. "'Twould sate
And shunt me quite 'without the Lord.'"

"You hate the meet—" "Not meet of hounds,"
I quickly cried; "be well assured."
"You naughty man!" says she. "Oh, zounds!
What! now again 'without the Lord!'

Our 'meet' is jolly—yours is sad;
I'm *triste* enough! now ain't I *broad?*"
She laugh'd, then sigh'd, "Come, you're too bad!
You wouldn't die 'without the Lord'?"

"Whose Lord?" I cried in savage haste;
"Faith! to my own I'm stoutly moor'd!
Your sickly one's not to my taste.
Now say, am I 'without the Lord'?"

She wept! "You are a radical!"
Crying's an art that always floor'd
Strong natures! Quick fid-fadical,
I then became "without the Lord."

As soon rebell'd—"Now just you try
A month with mine! and if allured
You don't become, and cease to cry
In doleful tones 'without the Lord,'

I'll eat my hat—your bonnet—you—
Your Lord and all—if not too awed!"
She wouldn't—sobbing, "'Tis too true,
You do exist 'without the Lord!'"

"Now, dear one, list! hear once for all"—
Straight up she look'd, nor longer jaw'd—
I smiling asked, "D' you like your *Paul?*
Yet long he was 'without the Lord!'

We go two ways about one thing—"
Just then a sober jackdaw caw'd,
"By hook or crook, 'tish de shame shing,
You neisher are 'wishout de Lord!'"

"My Lord," I urged, "is not confined
To churches—brick'd, or built with board!
He dwells in those of spirit kind;
Now *say*, am I 'without the Lord'?

He dwells in those whose love—so rare—
Urges them on to seek reward
Not in Earth's gay and thoughtless Fair.
Now say, *am* I 'without the Lord'?

Who toil with heart, and soul, and brain,
Through livelong day—or night, while stored
With midnight oil his spent lamps wane !
Now say, am *I* 'without the Lord' ?

Whose fitful sleep is full of dreams—
Swept down big rivers past the ford,
Or wreck'd, and past all hope he seems !
Now say, am I '*without* the Lord' ?

Mutt'ring short fragments of his book,
Vampyres would hover as he pour'd
His vengeance forth by word and look !
Now say, am I 'without *the* Lord' ?

Dozes again—starts—look ! he seizes
His pen, in bedgown to record
His midnight thoughts—the while it freezes !
Now say, am I 'without the *Lord*' ?

What's life to me without such Love !
With Universe awry—abroad !
I'd sooner *graze* in yonder grove
Than join your set with such a Lord !"

I paused—she shiver'd ; "Oh, my friend !"
She cried, "indeed I had ignored
Your deep, true nature ! Let us bend
The knee hereafter to one Lord !"

Years after, when sweet Alice meets
A fella drinking from his gourd
Big draughts of Bass, she ne'er repeats,
"I fear you are *without the Lord*."'

* * * * * * * *

'Who was the young lady?' asked Birdie, when the boys had gallopped off to call upon the late rector of Trememdon, laughing madly as they went along.

'Not knowing, cannot tell you, Birdie. We were perfect strangers. She was seriously desirous of doing me good, no doubt; but I have reason to think it ended in her own partial enlightenment,' replied Ralph.

'I thought I should never have stopped laughing during the recital,' said Birdie; 'and really, Ralph, Reggy deserves praise for keeping his countenance, for he was ready to die with laughter; and as to Alfred—poor child, I thought he was going into convulsions ! What funny things you wrote about in those days !'

'I had a good laugh over their quaintness myself,' Ralph replied.

'And the boys fully see and sympathise with the vein of sentiment animating and vermeating the whole,' continued she.

'Boys! darling Birdie. Why, how old is Reggy?' asked Ralph.

'I haven't any idea at all. A good many hundreds of thousands of what were once called years, I should think,' replied Birdie.

'And yet they only seem to be boys—they never appear to grow any older—it's so nice!' said Ralph; 'and isn't it jolly, too, to be quite rid of—'

'Of what, dear Ralph?' asked Birdie innocently.

'Can't you guess?' drawled he.

'Not a bit,' she replied.

'Why, then, of—of everything that's disagreeable, including—'

'Including what, dear old boy? do say.'

And Ralph, thinking of those fellows who used to profess to do the things which were lovely and of good report, said,

'Oh, don't let's mention them up here! 'twould profane our sanctuary, unhallow our bliss; and it is jolly bliss, isn't it?' asked he spoonily.

''Tis rather,' returned she dreamily.

'It's so nice!' said Ralph in the same tone, turning to gaze upon her.

With a kind of half assent Birdie drawled forth the words, 'Nse—very nice!' returning his gaze in the same fond manner.

And, of course, I had to leave them to themselves. When I returned I overheard Ralph saying, 'I do not give away my kisses.'

Carlo was looking up at them and wagging his tail. Perhaps he was jealous, though I haven't the faintest idea of what.

'They're rather prone to hide,' continued Ralph.

'Mine are not when Ralph is—' Birdie coloured and stopped.

'Mine never hide when Birdie is—' he stopped.

'When Ralph is—' she hesitated again.

'When Birdie is,' said he, regarding her with untold affection; 'what she always is—is everything to me! and love is everything—and love is—Birdie!'

THE END.

There's Something Else to read over-leaf.

THE SPECTRE.

THE RIVAL "HOUSES."

Showing How—owing to Inside and Outside Lobbying—
they did

NOT DO IT.

THE RIVAL "HOUSES."

'Joking decides great things,
Stronger and better oft than earnest can.'

HORACE;—*Milton's trans.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The Rt. Hon. Discriminating Summumup, Chairman of Select Committee, H. of C.; Sir Mettle Abuverprice Loftee Pherrettumowt, Chief Instigator; Mr. Jokoce Markhumdoun; Mr. Hevvy Pottschott; Sir Charles Bydeyerthyme; Sir Harry Snappschott; Mr. Brynghumdoun; Mr. Whaipthairiies; Mr. Whynghum; Mr. Trymmumup. St. Dives Widawake Didleap, Chairman U. V. Committee; Mr. Kuttandraied; Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie; St. Luke Scraporl Meekface; The Great Mogul de Riches' Court, M.P. for Farmersbury, Beechshire; St. Wary Obadiah Lankheart Mole, Vice Chairman U. V. Committee; Tyro-Saint Fidfad Lukewarm, Secretary ditto; St. Peter Gallwood; Phœnix Makemunnie Enniow Fleasum; Cervill Todi Grab. VICTIMS (who were so tamed and heart-broken that they had precious little left in 'em to say!) Phalanx of U. V. Brokers and Jobbers.

ACT I.—SCENE I.

Select Committee-Room H. of C. The year something, (A.D. of course).

Sir Mettle Pherrettumowt: 'Now then; St. Dives, do you call THAT a healthy state of things?' (Profound sensation.)

Phalanx of Vortex-brokers and jobbers—*sotto voce:* 'Hush, Dives! Mum's the word! You're listening?—Sh! *That's how it's done!*'

Sir Mettle (gaily): 'Come now, none o' that—I won't have

him prompted'—(sternly eyeing the U. V. Chairman)—'do *you* call—'

St. Dives: 'Oh, Sir Mettle! verily you're too many for me!' (hesitates, while Sir Mettle smiles bewitchingly.)—'well, Sir Mettle, if you *will* have it—NO!—but—er—'(again hesitates).

Sir Mettle, coming rollickingly to the rescue: 'That will do, St. Dives—very much obliged, I'm sure.' (To the reporters) 'Take his answer.' 'You can retire, St. Dives'—(aside) 'Ha-ha-ha!' (Exeunt).

Scene II.

One week later. Committee-Room, Undone Vortex. Not altogether unlike the first, only—*they sat with CLOSED DOORS!* N.B.—Sir Mettle was now universally regarded as THE VICTIMS' CHAMPION.

(Special meeting, Unusual Excitement, &c., &c.)

St. Peter: 'My brethren, taking into consideration the fatal admission made by the Chairman U. V. before the Select Committee H. of C., I beg to move that he be disranked.'

St. Luke: 'I beg to second the motion!' (Intense excitement.) Whereupon Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie straightway stood up in their midst and said: 'Gentlemen, I am fairly astounded!' (hear)—'gentlemen, "our respected Chairman" has done nothing to deserve such treatment. Hurrah for *Closed Doors!* Where we can do and say as we like! First, let me write to *The Age*. I'll tell the "outside fools" that in the matter of the introduction of Foreign Loans Neighbouring Countrees have not more safeguards than we have—indeed, not so many; and—er—(hesitates)—between ourselves, you know, do not swindle more unwary inhabitants, if so many. Again, the Undone Vortex is—er—comparatively speaking—er—*a most humane Institution*! and although it does ruin thousands, consider the incalculable benefits it confers (on US!) True, under different auspices, the benefits to the PUBLIC might be *as* large, but not *to us!* Therefore we'll remain as we are, if we can, and as long as we can! Q.E.D.!'

St. Wary: 'To this end, my brethren, let us initiate a powerfully organized system of Insi—I mean Outsi—I mean—of—LOB—LOBBYING!' (Enthusiastic Applause, during which the curtain fell.)

ACT II.—Scene I.

Committee-Room, Undone Vortex. A few weeks later. (Closed Doors! No reporters admitted!!). Extraordinary Meeting, all looking eager and excited.

St. Luke is desired to keep guard outside the double closed doors, the porters being despatched upon various pretences, on errands, while the Meeting lasts. No Eaves-dropping possible!

St. Dives (amidst breathless silence): 'My brethren, it is with profound and unalloyed mortification and sorrow that I feel compelled to make the following statement.' (*Movement.*) 'My brethren, verily it must be so—yea, indeed, there is a Traitor in the Camp!' (Great sensation.) 'Else, how could it be that "Ye Vampyres! A Legend of the National Betting-Ring. By the Spectre," contains a verbatim report of the proceedings of the U. V. Committee?'

Several Sternites: 'Ho-ho-ho-ho! A Traitor in the Camp! ho-ho!'

St. Dives: 'My brethren! our very existence depends upon SECRESY! and CLOSED DOORS! They are our LIFE-BLOOD! Without these adjuncts we are LOST! and we may as well shut up shop, and let "outsiders" in!'

Several Saints: 'Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!'

St. Dives: 'Therefore, my brethren, I have appointed our good brother Luke to keep watch *outside the outside door!* in order that not one word of our proceedings—proceedings, which I admit with all self-abasement, *concern the whole world!*—shall ever become public!'

Several Voices: 'Ugh! Ugh! Ugh!'—(then louder)—'Good, capital! Bravo, Brother Dives! You're the boy to hit the right nail on the head—'

'And Drive it Home,' meekly interposed the U.V. Chairman. 'Praised be the Lord, I can do that! And now to Business!'

All Voices: 'Yes, now to Business!'

St. Dives: 'My brethren! the outside door being well guarded, we may take breath and be at our ease for a few moments during this momentous crisis. My brethren! praised be God! yea verily! We shall yet keep the wicked under! Where is the Select Committee *now*, my brethren? Where, I ask, is the Select Committee of the H. of C. on Foreign Loans *now?*—Where!—why'—(a long pause, during which the tiniest snapping of a cobweb in a far corner of the room might

have been distinctly heard)—'NOWHERE!' wheezed St. Dives, through his clenched teeth. 'I told yer so! leave it all to me—'

Voices: 'And me! And me!'

St. Peter (tremulously): 'Ah! my brethren, I was at—Soo—Soo—Soo—SOODY and MANKEY's last night, and (sobs) felt my conscience considerably relieved thereby,—after a day spent in—Victimizing the Unwary! (a sigh). I do hope you will all go—'

Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie: 'Oh! do shut up, Peter—let's to business! Dives! lead the way!'

St. Dives (feeling greatly encouraged): 'My brethren! lo! our well organized system of LOBBYING hath indeed succeeded! Ah! thanks be to God—it hath!' (And then, with upturned eyes), 'Shall we sing a hymn, my brethren?'

Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie (savagely): 'No—no! to Business—let's to Business!'

St. Dives (blandly): 'I believe Full-o'-Munnie's right. I b'lieve so. Would he were one of us! How I should rejoice to be enabled to say—"*Brother Full-o'-Munnie!!!*"'

Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie: 'Do let me alone, St. Dives. I like my own prefix better—smacks of MONEY too!'

St. Dives: 'Ah! well, so doth mine! but to proceed. Verily, the Select Committee hath completely succumbed! Its wicked darts no longer pierce the servants of the Lord. But with all humility allow me to suggest, my brethren, that we do yet put on a much bolder front! Our dear brother Wary hath somewhat to say under this head.' (Turning to him) 'Brother Wary, say on.'

St. Wary (blandly as of yore): 'My brethren—both in and out of the Lord—for in this urgent matter Vortex Saints and Sinners must be united!' (Vociferous cheering.) 'In order to use despatch then, my dear brethren, let us keep DANGLING before the eyes of the Select Committee, and of the Public,—a GREAT BUGBEAR!' (All are taken aback, and look at one another in breathless expectation.)

St. Peter (feebly): 'Yes, but, good brother Wary, what bugbear?'

St. Wary (not heeding the interruption): 'To wit—loss of Business to the Old Countree, which will go to other and Neighbouring Countrees, viz.:—the Polite Countree, the Powerful and Greedy Countree, the Great Countree, the Wee Countree, &c., &c.—THAT will scare the Select Committee on Foreign Loans! BUGBEAR for ever! Hurrah for Closed

Doors ! ! !' (Sits down very complacently amidst salvoes of the wildest cheering.)

Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie : 'Yes, and I'll pitch it into 'em pretty stiff—leave me alone for that!—and (eyeing his *confrères* with a knowing look) I'll get a vote of thanks from the Select Committee into the bargain ! hia—hia—ha !'

All voices : 'No—no—Full-o'-Munnie—don't—don't overdo it ! the public'll see through that !'

Mr. Jobber F-o'-M. : 'I will ! Trust me! The Vortex of Undone City for ever ! hurroar! with its Closed Doors! hurroar! hurroar ! why don't you shout ?'

Not a word was now heard in response, however. Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie had it all to himself. Continuing in agitated, nervous tones, he asked : 'Does no one speak ? Then I will speak !—MONEY for EVER ! ! ! !'

(Intense Sensation, during which All Voices suddenly burst forth with) : 'Brother Jobber Full-o'-Munnie for ever ! Hurrah for MONEY ! and Closed Doors ! Hurrah for the Vortex! —for Bears ! and hurrah for Bulls ! hurrah ! hurrah !'

Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie (in a constrained voice and forced manner) : 'Let's be calm, my friends—to Business ! There's my dear friend the Great Mogul de Riches' Court, M.P.' (Profound Sensation.) 'Well, between you and me, that is, between Saints and the Sinner you see before you, he's going to —first of all—browbeat the Select Committee ! He won't stand their nonsense, I can tell you. After that he'll BUTTER the Select Committee ! ! ! ! hia—hia—ha—hia—ha !'

Chorus of Voices, the Saints the loudest : 'Capital ! Go it, old Full-o'-Munnie ! Hurrah for Closed Doors ! hia—hia—hia—ha !'

Mr. Jobber F-o'-M : 'Yes ! hia—hia—ha ! we'll thank 'em! very much too, but politely—very much obliged for—hum—er —their very great patience—tedious and painful investigations —characters at stake !—REVELATIONS !—'

Several Voices : 'Revelations ? Revelations ! hia—hia—ha ! why, we knew it all before ! hia—hia—ha !'

Mr. Jobber F-o'-M : 'Yes, but *that's how we must work it!* Then again—Loss of Business—'

Tyro-Saint Fidfad (ingenuously) : 'Swindles, you mean !'

All look aghast.

St. Wary (severely) : 'Silence, Fidfad !—no such term known on the Vortex !'

Chorus of Sternites : 'Let's butter the Committee, and Dangle the Bugbear ! ! !'

Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie: 'Schedule D!!!!!!' (Roars of Applause) 'That'll wake 'em up! Neighbouring Countrees getting all the World's Business!'

A Voice—so unlike all other voices heard that day—for it was hollow — it was prophetic—it was Spectral! — 'The SWINDLES? Let Neighbouring Countrees take *such* "Business." They're welcome to it! No Sound, Honest Business will ever leave the Old Countree if you will only be OPEN in all your DEALINGS with the PUBLIC! but SWINDLES —called by you FOOTBALLS — AVAUNT!— henceforth and for ever!'

The Spectre laughed 'Ha—ha!' Each member of that *very* Select Committee started, but I was gone! The curtain fell as I flitted into Space!!!!!

Scene II.

Select Committee-Room H. of C. A few days later. Crowded to suffocation. N.B.—VICTIMS appeared more Life-Weary and Scared than ever!

St. Dives (closely pressed): '*We cannot protect the public; business is business!*'—(aside)—'And Gambling is Gambling. I like it. Couldn't do without it—so used to it—hia—hia—ha!'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Yes, St. Dives, Business *is* Business! And Swindles are Swindles!'

St. Dives: 'There's no help for it that I know of. If you try, you'll only drive away Good Business!' (Profound Sensation.) (Aside) 'I wonder how they'll take *that!* Life would be intolerable without Gambling, and Swindles, and' (aloud) 'the Public will have 'em'—(aside) 'that is, the Vortex-Public—the Gamblers in Stocks and Shares' (aloud) 'Ha! we thus create "an immense market,"' (aside) 'that is, of course a Gambling One—hia—hia—ha—ain't it jolly!' (aloud) 'You can't do without US!' (*Movement*) 'And Time-bargains are the life of the world!' (aside) 'that is, *of our world!*' (aloud) 'and if you try to check them you'll nip in the bud the fresh and vigorous shoots of our rapidly extending Monetary and Financial Development!!!' (Aside) 'We don't intend to regulate our concerns on the Vortex by any Legislative Enactments: they become dead letters as soon as passed.' (Aloud, unconsciously) 'In short, we ignore you—beg pardon—well, I mean, for instance (eyeing the Chief Instigator), say you're a bear of Bank Shares—'

Sir Mettle: Me! oh, God forbid!—I!—a BEAR!'

St. Dives: 'Well, say *I* am, then, and you're a holder. Your only course is to buy up as fast as I sell—'

Sir Mettle (breathlessly): 'Oh, horror!'

St. Dives (aside): 'Ha—ha!—That gives *us* a double com.; the jobber a double turn—and all in the Interest of GAMBLING!' (Aloud.) 'There's no help for it!' (Immense sensation.)

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Yes, St. Dives, but do you not admit—'

St. Dives (interposing): 'Sir, I admit nothing—BUT the Necessity of the Vortex—and of Gambling—and of Swindles—oh, and of CLOSED DOORS!' (aside) 'hia—hia—ha!'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott (mildly): 'The Select Committee certainly *had*, at one time an object; viz., to reform your practices!' (aside) 'It's getting confoundedly demoralised now though—thanks to the City, long-purse, underhand Lobbying!' (aloud) 'but I'm afraid we shall have to give it up! We certainly should have liked to have arrived at some method of checking the introduction of Swindling Foreign Loans,' (grins from all connected with the Vortex) 'And we don't at all object to your playing at "Football" amongst yourselves, though we would rather you did not, simultaneously, depreciate the Stocks and Shares which are the property of the whole Nation, or—whilst raising worthless undertakings to high premiums in the market, cajole the Public into taking them off your hands when, at that premium they burst! but—er—'

St. Dives: 'If you try you'll only drive away Good Business!' (aside) 'Bugbear for ever! hia—ha!'

(The Spectre breathed) 'And Swindles too, St. Dives?'

He would not hear.

(I breathed again) 'Once the people get inside that "House" of yours, they'll take care of themselves fast enough. What *is* the good of YOU?'

St. Dives now heard me, for he muttered, 'To take care of Number One to be sure! what else?' (Retires in a very piously self-complacent frame of mind.) (Exeunt.)

ACT III.—Scene I.

Cervill Todi Grab was the next witness.

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Well, who are you, and what?'

Todigrab: 'Chief member of the Great Banking Firm of Grab Brothers, in Money Street.'

Mr. Whynghum: 'The Modern Financial Nero, I understand?'

Todigrab: 'Sir, I did not come here to be insulted. Sir, I feel to be getting hot' (aside) 'at any rate, I'll assume it,' (aloud) 'why, Sir, I'm a PUBLIC BENEFACTOR! Look at my Pretty Square which I gave to a most Ungrateful Nation! Listen to my sweet Band on Saturdays!—all dressed out so nice too!—with fountains splashing, and the idle contented crowds all gazing up at the inscription on the Statue ——"given by Cervill Todi Grab, Esq., M.P. .....for ever!!!"'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott (interrupting): 'Yes, yes, but we have nothing to do with that here. You would no doubt have gone on BEAUTIFYING every BACK SLUM in Undone City if they had only made the great man of you which you desired—with other people's money of course —'

Todigrab (hotly): 'With money I made, Sir; the people were fools, and I was sharp! that's all.'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Oh, "Sharp" you call it!—I have heard it called by a harsher name than that;—but,—let's to business.'

Todigrab (very much relieved): 'Yes—Yes—let's to business. Forgive me if I lost my temper! *I don't often do it.* But I won't be accused of—of—hum—I'll—I'll take your words down, Sir!' said Todigrab in rather an indignant manner—*for him!*

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Don't trouble! The reporters have done that already. How much did *you* net out of this "Backaway Loan"?'

Todigrab: 'Oh, I can't tell to a thousand or two. Of course, I didn't know it was such a rotten thing!' (aside) 'Really now, what fools they are to listen to me! hia—ha!' (aloud) 'or—er—of course I wouldn't have "touched" it' (several laughs) 'And I did not know there was no land for the "Backaway Deluded Victims," or I wouldn't have had anything to do with expatriating thousands of Old Countree labourers, their wives and families—to die and ROT on a Foreign Strand!—or go mad—or—'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott (beamingly): 'Oh, you did have something to do with that dark scheme—did you?' (To the reporters) 'Take that down also!' (To witness) 'You can retire, Todigrab.' (To the reporters) 'And that he always worked IN THE DARK!'

This witness said, on retiring, that he felt he was a very ill-used man!!!!! He then looked red in the face, and

muttered as he retired into his corner, 'One insult more, and you'll rouse—The Modern Financial CHEET-AH!' (Shrieks of hysterical laughter which they didn't suppress.) (Exeunt.)

Scene II.

Phœnix Makemunnie Enniow Fleasum deposed: 'I am a Wealthy and Highly Respectable member of a Very Highly Respected Firm of Merchants, carrying on business in Aurum Factors, Dooum Easy Lane, City of Undone. My firm—Catzpore and Fleasum—deals in Hemp and Jute and such like.'

Mr. Snappschott: 'Dealers in Hemp and Jute! Zounds! Sir, why did you "touch" these "Backaway Loans" then?'

Phœnix (with an oily smile): 'To make money to be sure! What do you think?'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Well, I suppose yours is merely a repetition of all those other Swindles? Buying back before allotment, and so on?'

Phœnix (smiling in a still oilier manner): 'The Lord bless you, Sir—"Backaway" caps them all! Why, the "Bears" set to work in right down earnest over "Backaway!" and we bought it all up—'

Sir Mettle (suddenly): 'Bought what up?'

Phœnix: 'The Bits-of-Paper—called BONDS! Well, it *was* a rotten Stock, you know. We knew that. We made the "House" buy 'em all back again—'

Sir Mettle (sadly and wearily): 'Buy what back, Sir?'

Phœnix: 'The Bits-of-Paper, Sir—hia—hia—ha! *That's how it's done!* And when our little game was played, then, and not until then, we let the market take its course!—the "Bears" got frightfully pickled!—We made our piles—Dupes got the Bits-of Paper, and all out of a rotten stock! hia—hia—ha!'

And Sir Mettle looked sadder yet. And Sir Mettle appeared wearier than before. And then Sir Mettle gushed forth from out the bottom of his big warm heart the words: 'Curse their City Money! Confound their Lobbying Tricks! But what can I do ALONE?—I, Chief Instigator though I am—!!!'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Now, Phœnix, a gentleman writes to say that he warned your Highly Respectable Firm, days before the first allotment, that your prospectus told A LIE!' (Much excitement, and cries of 'Most Unparliamentary!' &c., &c.) 'for that the indebtedness of "Backaway" was,

according to DUDLEY BAXTER'S Work on *National Expenditure*, £5,000,000! whereas your prospectus put it down at £213,000!'

Phœnix: 'Can't recollect at all.'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Can't recollect, Sir?—not convenient, I suppose! Where's Burly John? Why doesn't he appear?'

Phœnix: 'What! my brother!—no—no! he knows too much, and you'd get it all out of him. Hia—hia—ha!'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Were you not present when Burly John was warned?'

Phœnix (aside): 'Catch me tripping! No, not this child! Hia—ha!' (Aloud) 'Can't remember.'

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Should it not have acted as a warning to you—not to allot? Your prospectus was false, and you were told so!'

Phœnix: 'Don't know anything at all about it. Can't remember!' (Aside) '*I wanted to allot! Hia!—ha!*

Mr. Hevvy Pottschott: 'Do you think that you, as Merchants (of Jute and Hemp and such like) of considerable eminence in the Great City of Undone, were justified in bringing out one of the greatest flesh-and-blood traffic Swindles?—'

Phœnix (boisterously interrupting): 'Yes, of course,—to MAKE MONEY!—anything to make money! Hia—hia—ha!' (Retires in a glorious state of Exuberance, leaving the Select Committee bewildered and *distrait.*) (Exeunt.)

ACT IV.—SCENE I.

Mr. Kuttandraied being next examined, said: 'Mr. Chairman, the Effect of the Revelations brought to light by the Select Committee is truly astounding! But there is much to be said on both sides. The U. V. Committee can enforce any law they like; but then, they don't want to!! Backed up by the public—that is, the Gambling Public—the 2,000 members are only *en accord* with the Gambling Public! True, the proportion of the Gambling Public may be, comparatively speaking, small indeed; yet they're a very decided lot, and will kick up a great bobbery if you try to meddle with 'em!' (BUGBEAR!) 'Of course we all know there are thousands ruined by Undone Vortex Gambling, and also that once the Public gets a taste of its wild, enslaving thralls, they can never

get out! Well, we don't want 'em to! So don't you try to stop the youth of this once Merrie Old Countree from being ruined! For, if you do, you'll have US to fight! and it shall be a tough battle! Undone Vortex for ever!—with its Closed Doors! True, we might try and do something to stop the scandals attending Foreign Loans, but—don't you try to stop dealings before Allotment!—mind that! and—'

The Rt Hon. Discriminating Summumup: 'Then you have no remedies to suggest?'

Mr. Kuttandraied: 'All attempts would end in smoke! And you would drive BUSINESS—'

Sir Mettle (sharply): 'Come! we've had that Bugbear before, often enough, too. It is evident that you think the Public are to take everything upon trust; to know nothing; to be told nothing; and to lend their money—their MILLIONS—for which they have toiled and worked so hard during many a livelong day—*to Foreign Governments* forsooth! —without a Guarantee of any kind whatever—without a Security of any sort! And, moreover, you expect—after what has so recently come to light about the intimate relations between Foreign States and Contractors—that the Public will go on lending their hard-earned savings just as freely as ever; you admitting all the while, with an enviable frankness, that PUBLICITY in such transactions is not theirs, as a matter of Right! Would you lend money to your next door neighbour upon such terms?'

Mr. Kuttandraied (with a merry twinkle in his eye): 'I should say not, Sir Mettle!'

Sir Mettle: 'Of course not. And yet you ask *the Public* to lend *theirs!* You next proceed to *make a market* in order to lead them to believe that it is "a good thing," and get them to subscribe, or buy—you all the while denying them access to the most simple, fundamental facts, regarding the loan—facts, which if they knew would, you yourself admit, be fatal to its success! Can anything be more conceivably monstrous?'

Mr. Kuttandraied (aside): 'I shall be jolly glad when the Select Committee's over!' (Aloud) 'If you really are in earnest, Sir Mettle, Schedule D will find it out!' (Aside) 'I wonder how he likes that, now!' (Aloud, with an air of triumph) 'Schedule D, Sir Mettle!—Schedule D.!!!!'

Sir Mettle (aside, snatching a pen and writing vigorously): 'That cock shan't fight, anyhow!' (Aloud) 'Now, Mr. K., I ask you calmly, and expect as calm a reply. Do you think, now, that Schedule D would have suffered *very much*, if—say

the "Backaway Loans' had not been "floated"?' (No reply.) 'Do you think, then, any sound business would leave the Old Countree just because ordinary business precautions were adopted at the date of its inception? In a word, Mr. K., if Foreign States intend to be honest, has it never struck you that their first care should be that Candour and a Proper Understanding should exist between themselves and the Public—who really, after all, supply their pressing needs? Do Neighbouring Countrees, as a rule, prove themselves so greedy as to clutch at Rotten Loans which we reject, for the sake of the Vortex Gambling attached to their manipulation? If so, they're welcome to them! What would you think of a business Firm, with whom you were connected, enshrouding all its transactions in an impenetrable haze of mystery—you all the while having no tangible security whatever of theirs, and they owing you immense sums of money?'

Mr. Kuttandraied: 'Me? oh, Sir Mettle! don't ask me! why press it home so? indeed, Sir Mettle, I should close accounts with them at once!'

Sir Mettle (severely): 'Then let the public close accounts with uncandid, unbusiness-like Foreign States! and' (getting somewhat irate, but still with a trace of the old smile) '*bother Schedule D!!!*' (Exeunt.)

Scene II.

The Great Mogul de Riches' Court was next examined. He said: 'I am a stickler for old, old ways. They suit me and my Firm. Why the deuce have you—the Select Committee on Foreign Loans—got up all this botheration and fuss? *You* spoilt my Fernland Loan the other day. Syndicates stink now. The U. V. Committee refused a quotation because I let a Syndicate have it for less than the Public!—only 1 per cent. too! It's abominable! all through you too! And now it's at a discount!—a loan issued by ME!—The Great Mogul!—at a DISCOUNT!' growled he, 'before all the Instalments are paid! Fernland is honest, and will pay like a brick! Why, it's simply awful! If you go on as you're now doing—you'll shake the—Foundations of—— SOCIETY!!!!' (Intense *Movement*, and a long pause.) He then added, excitedly: 'I am respectable! Eminently so! By the Lord Harry! don't I look so?' (Aside) 'I could buy you all up in here, I reckon.' (Aloud) 'I pause for a reply.' (Murmurs of applause amongst the Phalanx of U. V. Brokers and Jobbers, which were at once suppressed.) 'Do you still doubt me? Me! the Great

Mogul de Riches' Court!' (Sensation.) 'I don't see how you're going to alter anything for the better without bringing down the entire Financial Fabric of Monetary Society!!!!! So beware! I'm not a fool! I made all my vast wealth out of the public, so I ought to know. (Excitement.) I am Wealthy. Truly Wealthy. Fabulously Wealthy. My Firm rolls in MONEY! So did my Grandfather's! When my Grandfather, some years ago, brought out—'

The Rt. Hon. Discriminating Summumup (Aside): 'Confound his Grandfather! what the devil has the Select Committee to do with his Grandfather?' (To the Great Mogul, in his beamingest of manners) 'Yes, ah, yes—I dessay—then, oh Great Mogul! you have no remedies to suggest?'

The Great Mogul: 'Well, you can't cure Gambling, you know. It has been tried before. You can't do it.' (Aside) 'And I'm blowed if I want you to—that's more!'

The Rt. Hon. Discriminating Summumup: 'Take the Vortex-brokers, for instance—shouldn't they be able to advise their clients—just a little, you know?'

The Great Mogul: 'A Vortex-broker advise a client! advise? aren't you joking now?' (Aside) 'I mustn't tell 'em too much!' (Aloud) 'As for me, I wouldn't take the advice of a broker living—generally act upon the opposite! *Their* advice indeed! No, no—none o' that for me! Each man for himself's my motto, and—you know the rest! hia—hia—ha!'

The Chairman of the Select Committee: 'Anything else?'

The Great Mogul heaved a sigh; he drew a longer breath, and thus proceeded: 'I'll never divulge to the Outside Public the terms of Contract between a Foreign State and myself. *As well expect me to tell the price of a horse!*' (Aside) 'True, if the public were going to pay for that horse, and ride that horse, and trust their necks to that horse, they might be justified in getting a competent Vet's opinion of it before purchase—what fools the Select Committee are not to put the matter in that light!!'

Sir Mettle (aside): 'The circumstances are not in the least parallel—but what's the use of bothering *with him?* Hang their City influence! ah me! ah me!' (Aloud) 'Then you would leave everything and everybody to the tender mercies of the Committee of the Undone Vortex?'

The Great Mogul (cheerfully): 'Precisely so!'

Sir Mettle (seriously, with no trace of a smile): 'Everything?'

The Great Mogul (stolidly): 'Everything!'

The Rt. Hon. Discriminating Summumup (beamingly as of yore) : 'And everybody to *their* tender mercies ?'

The Great Mogul (approvingly) : 'Everybody !' (Aside) 'It suits my books, I know. And brings in lots of grist to the mill ! *my* mill !—hia—hia—ha !—why, *that's how it's done !*'

The Spectre laughed 'Ha—ha !—it shall be yet—*Undone !* Now, Sir Mettle ! cheer up, old fellow ! mum's the word ! it shall !' He turned. The old smile came back once more. 'Twas too much ! I was off ! ! ! (Exeunt.)

THE RIVAL "HOUSES."

SCENE I.—The Year something, (A.D., of course.)

Dramatis Personæ.—The Rt. Hon. Discriminating Summumup, Chairman of Select Committee, H. of C.; Sir Mettle Abuverprice Loftee Pherrettumowt, Chief Instigator, &c., &c. St. Dives Widawake Didleap, Chairman, U. V. Committee. Phalanx of U. V. Brokers and Jobbers. VICTIMS (who were so tamed and heartbroken that they had precious little left in 'em to say).

ACT I.—Sir Mettle Pherrettumowt: "Now then, St. Dives, do you call THAT a healthy state of things?" (Profound sensation.)

Phalanx of Vortex-brokers and Jobbers—*sotto voce*: "Hush, Dives! Mum's the word! You're listening?—'Sh! *That's how it's done!*"

Sir Mettle (gaily): "Come now, none o' that—I won't have him prompted"—(sternly eyeing the U. V. Chairman)—"do *you* call——"

St. Dives: "Oh, Sir Mettle! verily you're too much for me!"—(hesitates, while Sir Mettle smiles bewitchingly)—"well Sir Mettle, if you *will* have it—NO!—but—er——" (again hesitates.)

Sir Mettle, coming rollickingly to the rescue: "That will do, St. Dives—very much obliged, I'm sure." (To the reporters) "Take his answer." "You can retire, St. Dives"—(aside) "Ha, ha, ha!"

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.—One week later. Another Committee-room, not unlike the first, only—*they sat with CLOSED DOORS!*

Dramatis Personæ.—St. Dives, Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie, St. Luke Meekface, St. Peter Gallwood, St. Wary Obadiah Lankheart Mole, Tyro-Saint Fid-fad Lukewarm, Secretary, &c., &c. (No Reporters allowed!) N.B. Sir Mettle was now universally regarded as THE VICTIMS' CHAMPION.

ACT I.—(Special Meeting, Unusual Excitement, &c., &c.)

St. Peter: "My brethren, taking into consideration the fatal admission made by the Chairman, U. V. before the Select Committee, H. of C., I beg to move that he be disranked."

St. Luke: "I beg to second the motion." (Intense excitement.)

Whereupon Mr. Jobber Full-o'-Munnie straightway stood up in their midst, and said: "Gentlemen, I am fairly astounded!" (hear)—"gentlemen, 'our respected Chairman' has done nothing to deserve such treatment. Hurrah for *closed doors!* where we can do and say as we like! First, let me write to *The Age*. I'll tell the 'outside fools' that in the matter of the introduction of Foreign Loans, Neighbouring Countrees have not more safeguards than we have—indeed, not so many; and—er—(hesitates)—between ourselves, you know, do not swindle more unwary inhabitants, if so many. Again, the Undone Vortex is—er—comparatively speaking—er—a *most humane Institution!* and although it does ruin thousands, consider the incalculable benefits it confers (on US!!) True, under different auspices, the benefits to the PUBLIC might be *as* large, but not *to us!* Therefore we'll remain as we are, if we can, and as long as we can!—Q.E.D."

St. Wary: "To this end, my brethren, let us initiate a powerfully organized system of Insi—I mean Outsi—I mean—of—LOB—LOBBYING!" (Enthusiastic applause, during which the curtain fell.)